

From the Masculine to the Feminine
Eunuch Images in Hong Kong *Wuxia* Films from the
1960s to the early 2010s

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Abstract

The eunuch characters, representing a classic type of villain, usually feature strongly in Chinese audiences' memories about Hong Kong cinema, especially the *wuxia* genre during its glorious days in the twentieth century. They were created and stereotyped in Hong Kong cinema, developing with every rise and fall of Hong Kong *wuxia* genre, and varying at every crucial moment of the modern history of Hong Kong.

In the light of not only western gender and culture theories in regard to the concepts of masculine and feminine, but also Chinese philosophies in terms of *yin* and *yang* in particular, this thesis sets out to explore the evolution of the gender and cultural presentation of eunuch images in Hong Kong *wuxia* films from the 1960s to the early 2010s. With the aid of Jean Baudrillard and Judith Butler's theories, the two terms masculine and feminine will be argued as being not simply effective in gender representation, but also valid in outlining the logical mechanism which governs the organisation of the cultural phenomena. Meantime, Michel Foucault and Laura Mulvey's findings about the relationship between power and gaze will be employed to anatomise the specific case of culture construction.

The exploration of eunuch images will be intertwined with the examination of the Hong Kong cultural identity not only in the interactive triangle relationship between Hong Kong, Britain and China before 1997, but also in an interdependent Hong Kong-mainland connection in the post-colonial situation. Hong Kong filmmakers, in different circumstances with different cultural identities, proceeded to project

different social expectations onto their cultural construction in Hong Kong cinema. The construction of the eunuch images, which includes the portrayal of their gender characteristics, power and social status, will be argued as deriving from these social expectations.

By these means, this thesis aims at providing an insight into the shift in the cultural pattern of Hong Kong cinema between the pursuit of a dualistic certainty and the advocacy of a pluralistic uncertainty. Based on a review of eunuch images in the history of Hong Kong films, this study represents a nostalgic account of the past glory of Hong Kong cinema, while also conveying an aspiration for a better tomorrow.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Preamble

A highly-developed and modernised place, which has nevertheless been stigmatised as a hybrid of eastern and western achievements of civilisation, Hong Kong has always been a city under different spotlights. Over the past half century, Hong Kong culture, particularly its popular culture, has frequently set fashions or trends for the cultures of East and Southeast Asia. In other words, the development of Hong Kong's popular culture has long been and will continue to be a barometer which could display a general trend and direction of cultural transformation in a fast-changing world. With the aim of exploring the transformation of popular culture in modern society, this thesis will research the development of Hong Kong's popular culture in the past half century as an epitome of cultural transformation. In order to elucidate such a transformation, the concepts of masculine and feminine will be applied to the discursive power structure and the momentum behind Hong Kong's popular culture in different periods.

Hong Kong films are undoubtedly one of the most striking ingredients of Hong Kong's popular culture and have even had an influence on Hollywood films. This thesis will focus on Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre, which is an indispensable part of Hong Kong films and has exerted a significant impact on the prosperity of Hong Kong

films.¹ More specifically, eunuch images constructed in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films, made from the 1960s to the early 2010s, will be the subjects of the research.

To choose these eunuch figures as the objects of this study, there are two main reasons. First, they have been special products of Hong Kong's popular culture over the past half century. To be specific, these images were initially created by Hong Kong director and subsequently stereotyped and became widely known in Hong Kong films. Comparatively, these images rarely appeared in Mainland and Taiwan films. A stereotypical eunuch in these films possesses superb martial arts skills with great political power but is also depicted as a key villain. Till today, Hong Kong directors still keep their interests in depicting the modeling eunuchs in *wuxia* genre. It is not an exaggeration to say that these eunuch images have become typical Hong Kong iconic images. Secondly, eunuchs' gender ambiguity contributes another reason for choosing them as samples in the study of Hong Kong culture. To a great extent, Hong Kong society could be viewed as a space typically characterised with distinct cultural ambiguity between Western and Eastern ideologies since the beginning of its colonial history. It might be because of this cultural ambiguity that eunuch images could initially survive and keep developing in the cultural space of Hong Kong. However, this assumption does not imply that in Hong Kong culture eunuchs are constructed with great sympathy. They are portrayed as villains in most cases. Apart from these eunuch images, other roles, such as intersex and transvestite who are scarcely found in Mainland or Taiwan films, could easily survive in Hong Kong culture as well. Hong Kong culture gives more tolerance to these images of marginal, unusual or abnormal

¹ The term *wuxia*, when it is employed to identify a film genre, has been interchangeably used with other terms such as "martial arts" and "swordplay". *Wu* could be literally translated as martial or military force; *xia* may refer to a chivalry spirit or a person with chivalry spirit. Later on in this chapter, further explanation of this term will be provided.

characteristics. Choosing eunuch images as the central targets could also help the exploration of development of Hong Kong culture deriving from its ambiguous culture identity.

This model is so successful that it has not only dominated the depiction of eunuchs in Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre for half a century, but also profoundly influenced the depiction of eunuchs in *wuxia* films made in Taiwan and Mainland China. Although such stereotypical eunuchs have been most of the time a visible aspect of Hong Kong films over the past half century, these stereotypical features have experienced a series of changes during different periods of time. In this thesis, the physical appearance and characteristics of eunuchs in films will be viewed as a text which is constructed according to various social expectations. This research will start to explore these social expectations by investigating the subtle differences, especially the different gender presentations, apparent in eunuch figures in different periods, and then further examine the discursive power structure and logic behind these differences.

1.2 Theoretical Frameworks

In this thesis, the theoretical foundation for applying the masculine and the feminine to investigate different cultural patterns is mainly adopted from Jean Baudrillard's and Judith Butler's definitions of these two concepts. According to Baudrillard, the masculine model and feminine model are interpreted as two logics rather than two descriptive items for gender features.² According to Butler, the

² Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 96-98.

masculine implies a dualistic pattern while the feminine exhibits pluralistic grammars.³ Along these lines, the masculine and the feminine could be further specified as an inspection of a dualistic logic and a pluralistic logic in contemporary culture. Additionally, a cultural transformation could be embodied as a shift between these two logics. These investigations outline the main research objectives of this thesis. However, the problem of how such investigations could be practiced and how the two logics could be examined require not only theoretical supports from the cultural definitions of these two concepts, but also their gender implications, and both the cultural and the gender connotations will be closely illustrated later.

This study will examine the transformation of Hong Kong's popular culture mainly in two layers. These two layers involve two ways of applying masculinity and femininity. In the first layer, the cultural transformation is embodied as a shift between a dualistic logic marked as a masculine logic, and a pluralistic logic signifying a feminine logic. In the second layer, the cultural transformation is characterised as a transition between a pursuit of the value of masculinity and a pursuit of the value of femininity. These two layers are mutually complementary, with the former leading this research on the whole, and the latter contributing to the specific studies.

The gender representation of eunuch characters will be studied against different social expectations, rather than a presentation of what eunuchs should be according to anatomical observation or historical records. In other words, how eunuchs are gendered in different periods is at the service of the public's expectations for such malleable figures. By examining the social expectations behind the masculinisation or

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 25.

the feminisation of eunuch characters, this thesis will investigate different pursuits of the values of masculinity and femininity in different periods, and explore the dualistic logic or pluralistic logic that governs Hong Kong's popular culture.

1.2.1 Sexual and gender implications of the masculine and the feminine

Prior to applying the masculine model and the feminine model to the study of Hong Kong's popular culture, an introduction to the common usage of two terms—the masculine and the feminine—is indispensable. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, these two terms are explained as follows:

Masculine: /'mæskjʊlɪn, 'mɑ:s-/ *adj. & n. –adj.* **1** of or characteristic of men. **2** manly, vigorous. **3** (of a woman) having qualities considered appropriate to a man. **4** *Gram.* of or denoting the gender proper to men's names. *–n. Gram.* the masculine gender, a masculine word. □□**masculinely** *adv.* **masculineness** *n.* **masculinity** /-'lɪnɪtɪ/ *n.* [ME f. OF *masculine -ine* f. L *masculus* (as MALE)]⁴

Feminine: /'femɪnɪn/ *adj. & n. –adj.* **1** of or characteristic of women. **2** having qualities associated with women. **3** womanly, effeminate. **4** *Gram.* of or denoting the gender proper to women's names. *–n. Gram.* a feminine gender or word. □□**femininely** *adv.* **feminineness** *n.* **femininity** /-'nɪnɪtɪ / *n.* [ME f. OF *feminin -ine* or L *femininus* f. *femina* woman]⁵

According to the dictionary definitions of masculine and feminine, these two terms could be understood from at least two different, while at the same time, complementary layers. In the first layer, the masculine and the feminine are used to

⁴ R. E. Allen, H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 728.

⁵ R. E. Allen, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 430.

describe the characteristics of men and women respectively. Obviously, from this perspective, masculine characteristics belong to men, while feminine characteristics belong to women. What these basic meanings signify is that masculinity and femininity are naturally and exclusively divided by a clear sex boundary. This way of understanding masculinities and femininities is founded on a biological cognition, and it fundamentally influences the general anticipations of how men and women should behave. The recognition of the biological difference between sexes could have an immediate impact on the social expectations for men and women. For instance, generally, people are not encouraged to adopt the dress of the opposite sex; negative comments are still likely to be made about men with feminine features or women with masculine forms of behaviour. The social expectations here are more about the implications of the masculine and the feminine in the second layer. In this layer, the masculine and the feminine are delegated to mark the gender distinction, as in the terms “the masculine gender” and “the feminine gender” shown above.⁶ In this case, masculinities do not have to signify men’s behaviours only. For instance, the *Oxford Dictionary* states that a woman can also exhibit the qualities which are usually assigned to a man; while femininities, which are believed to be proper to women, do not have to be associated with women’s behaviours exclusively.⁷ The importance of “factors ‘outside the body’ or ‘environmental’ factors” has been highlighted by a number of theorists who have focused on the gender difference.⁸ In her research of sex and gender politics, Gayle Rubin indicates that

⁶ R. E. Allen, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 728 & 430.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Mary Vetterling-Braggin, ed. “Femininity,” “Masculinity,” and “Androgyny”: *A Modern Philosophical Discussion* (Totowa: Rowman & Allanheld Publishers, 1982), 36.

Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of “feminine” traits; in women, of the local definition of “masculine” traits.⁹

Such a manner of interpreting the masculine and the feminine complements the understanding of these two terms by emphasising a “local version” rather than a biological division of them. In other words, social conventions play a crucial role in moulding the significance of one’s masculinities and femininities in certain circumstances.

In Chinese contexts, eunuchs are typically described as *bu nan bu nü* (不男不女), which can be literally translated as neither men nor women. This term, on the one hand, reveals the biological-based conception of masculine and feminine. On the other hand, it displays the public’s presumption or expectation of eunuchs. In other words, eunuchs are expected to appear or behave differently from men and women, and this profoundly influences the depiction of eunuchs in various works. In most cases, they are portrayed as men with feminine external traits. Even though they are masculinised in some aspects, the masculinities tend to be described as extreme characteristics that ordinary men can seldom achieve. For instance, in Hong Kong films, most of them have matchless martial arts skills and some of them even have supernatural powers or an undead body. All these phenomena suggest that they are expected to behave abnormally. In this case, the description *bu nan bu nü* could be

⁹ Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex”, *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 180.

viewed as not only a biological-based conception, but also a manifestation of the social expectation of eunuchs.

1.2.2 A struggle of expectation: the problematic division of masculinity and femininity

With the goal of clarifying what masculinity and femininity are, Mary Vetterling-Braggin tried to categorise typical representations of these two concepts. According to Vetterling-Braggin, a masculine person may exhibit psychological traits such as “strength of will, ambition, courage, independence, assertiveness, aggressiveness, hardiness, rationality or the ability to think logically, abstractly and analytically and ability to control emotion”; while a feminine person may display qualities such as “gentleness, modesty, humility, supportiveness, empathy, compassionateness, tenderness, nurturance, intuitiveness, sensitivity and unselfishness”.¹⁰

Vetterling-Braggin’s descriptions are valuable for exemplifying masculine and feminine traits. Moreover, these descriptions provide somewhat detailed references according to which masculinity and femininity could be clearly determined. For instance, referring to the masculine traits listed above, most eunuch characters could be interpreted as masculine due to their pursuit of superb martial arts skills. Such a pursuit is clearly related to masculine characteristics such as “strength of will”, “hardiness”, “aggressiveness”, and “ambition” and so on.

However, in an ancient Chinese context, defining martial power as a representation of masculinity would be questionable. Generally speaking, the Chinese terms *yang* and *yin* are commonly translated as the masculine and the feminine

¹⁰ Vetterling-Braggin, “*Femininity*,” “*Masculinity*,” and “*Androgyny*”, 5-6.

respectively. The masculine/feminine division and the *yin/yang* division have one thing in common, which is that both divisions set up a hierarchy of masculine/*yang* over feminine/*yin*. What is different is the standard used to divide masculine/feminine or *yang/yin*. In ancient Chinese contexts, martial or military power was typically deemed to be *yin* in comparison with civic virtues, which were deemed to be *yang*. For instance, in the book *Huangdi Sijing* (黄帝四经), the earliest extant manuscript about the Huang-Lao school of philosophy – an important branch of Taoism, martial force and civic strategies, as two indispensable aspects of statecraft, respectively correspond to chastising power (刑) and beneficent power (德).¹¹ The former power symbolises the nature of autumn and winter, so it could be classed as *yin*; the latter, the nature of spring and summer, so it could be assigned as *yang*.¹² According to this standard, eunuchs, who have matchless martial arts skills and subdue people by violence, should be classed as feminine. These opposite concepts of the martial power between the two different cultural contexts clearly uncover a fact that there are no universally accepted explanations of masculinity and femininity.

Lewis M. Terman and Catharine Cox Miles notice “the lack of agreement” in rating the “acquaintances on degree of masculinity and femininity of personality”, and point out that the disagreement may arise from “(1) varying opinion[s] as to what factors truly differentiate the M-F types, and (2) varying interpretations of specific kinds of observed behavior”.¹³ It is not an exaggeration to say that everyone has

¹¹ Guying Chen annotates and trans, *Huangdi sijing jinzhu jinyi* (黄帝四经今注今译, *The Huangdi Sijing with modern annotations and translations*), (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007), 149.

¹² *Ibid.*, 217.

¹³ Lewis M. Terman and Catharine Cox Miles, *Sex and Personality: Studies in Masculinity and Femininity* (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1936), 3.

his/her unique list of masculine characteristics and feminine qualities according to their different personal experience and knowledge.

From an anthropological point of view, Margaret Mead finds, from her study of three primitive societies, that the attitudes towards masculinity and femininity involve different qualities in different groups. Specifically, in her work *Sex and Temperament: In Three Primitive Societies*, she mentions that qualities like “passivity, responsiveness, and a willingness to cherish children” which are traditionally viewed as the feminine, “can so easily be set up as the masculine pattern in one tribe, and in another be outlawed for the majority of women as well as for the majority of men”.¹⁴

Thus defining the masculine and the feminine by listing their typical embodiments becomes unreliable. Moreover, it is impossible to find a unified standard for these two concepts. With the aim to explain the basic meaning of these two concepts without excessive specification, the *Oxford Dictionary* sets up criteria to determine them by appealing to the wording of “appropriate to” and “proper to”.¹⁵ In the dictionary, the masculine is defined as “qualities considered appropriate to a man”, or the gender “proper to men’s names”; while the feminine is illustrated to be the gender “proper to women’s names”.¹⁶ The words “appropriate” and “proper” cannot provide definite clarifications of what exactly the masculine and the feminine are. However, it is exactly such “blurriness” that allows the flexibility and freedom of different cultures in different times and different contexts to define masculine and feminine in ways that suit the power structure in place. Therefore, what features are considered “proper” and “appropriate” to men and women’s names in certain contexts

¹⁴ Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Limited, 1935), 279-280.

¹⁵ R. E. Allen, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 728 & 430.

¹⁶ Ibid.

are good barometers for understanding the real cultural contexts. This is exactly what this research attempts to discuss and discover: how the eunuch images have been shaped differently according to the different concepts of masculinity and femininity in different periods of Hong Kong. The research does this in order to provide some insights into the understanding of Hong Kong culture from a gendered perspective.

In the process of exploring “the varied meaning of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’”, Eleanor E. Maccoby clearly points out that it is difficult to “list exactly what attributes are necessary and sufficient to determine whether a person (or even a given bit of behavior) is to be called masculine or feminine”.¹⁷ However, she simultaneously emphasises that

[T]he key to the idea of masculinity or femininity as referring to an individual’s conformity to sex roles, however, is that in any society social expectations and prescriptions specify how a male or a female person is to act, and what social functions that person is allowed or expected to perform.¹⁸

As analysed above, the masculine and the feminine are interpreted as constructions according to social expectations and prescriptions for men and women, and they mark two models which men and women are expected to act on or emulate. Earlier, Mead had also identified the key role of social expectations. She treats each tribe as a society and insists that in different tribes, the masculine and the feminine are embodied differently; this suggests that what she discusses are also different social expectations and definitions of the masculine and the feminine.

¹⁷ Eleanor E. Maccoby, *The Varied Meanings of “Masculine” and “Feminine”*, *Masculinity/Femininity: Basic Perspectives*, ed. June Machover Reinisch, Leonard A. Rosenblum, and Stephanie A. Sanders (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 232

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

Given that social expectations for men and women are crucial to the ideas of masculinity and femininity, the two terms could be further interpreted as deriving neither from biological men nor biological women, but rather from conventional concepts of ideal men and women. Ideally, the biological male and the biological female should endeavour to act out the ideal expectations. However, the fact is that not everyone chooses to do this perfectly. For instance, men may become house husbands, just as women may become warriors. Besides, some people are born to be or choose to be homosexual, and this phenomenon widely exists in the world, even though in most countries and regions they are stigmatised for not actively acting according to social expectations, and their unions are still officially disapproved, especially by marriage legislation.

Social expectation deeply influences the portrayal of eunuchs' masculinity and femininity. In the Chinese context, especially guided by the Confucian philosophy, a person's masculinities and femininities could be enhanced by his or her social value or political status. A leading status with high achievements in politics contributed to one's masculinity, while a subordinate status was always marked as feminine. On this point, eunuchs could be deemed to be feminine due to their primary role as palace servants, and they could also be regarded as masculine for their political significance. However, even though some eunuchs in history were influential in politics, their masculine position, in the eyes of most ancient scholars, obviously goes against their originally prescribed feminine role. This is why eunuchs in Chinese history were always criticised for working their way into high political power. In most contemporary films, they are still demonised for wielding power.

Besides, in sex and gender aspects, eunuchs could also be viewed as examples of the failure to conform to ideal sex roles. The conception *bu nan bu nü*, neither men nor women, suggests that they are the figures least likely to exhibit ideal masculinities and femininities. However, from a different perspective, it is exactly this conception that unites the two concepts, masculinity and femininity, in one image: it would be less possible to determine eunuchs as neither men nor women if there was not prior agreement of how men and women should behave. For the same reason, the notion of a “third sex”, which has been invented for eunuchs as well as other figures with uncommon sexual conditions, is founded on the understanding of what men and women should be like. This point also reveals that the depiction of eunuchs is closely associated with conventional ideas about masculinity and femininity.

1.2.3 A barometer of masculine society or feminine society: social expectations for men and women in different power structures

As expounded above, in different societies in different times, the conventional expectations of men and women could be greatly different. Such a difference indicates a variation in valuing masculine power or feminine power in different circumstances. In other words, these two types of value or power may show different privileges in different societies. In Simone de Beauvoir’s criticism of male-dominated society, she points out that women are not born, but obtain their gender through their involvement in society.¹⁹ De Beauvoir’s thoughts are strong assertions that the masculine and the feminine are socially moulded and that how to mould them in a patriarchal society fundamentally rests upon the patriarchal power structure, in which

¹⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, Toronto: Everyman’s Library, 1993), 281.

men are the norm and women can only be categorised as “the second sex”.²⁰ By citing de Beauvoir in his work, Erving Goffman further emphasises masculine domination in its suppression of feminine power. He points out that “through social discipline ... a mask of manner can be held in place from within. But, as Simone de Beauvoir suggests, we are helped in keeping this pose by clamps that are tightened directly on the body, some hidden, some showing”.²¹ According to Goffman, girls may “play down their intelligence, skills and determinativeness when in the presence of datable boys”.²² As a consequence, “the natural superiority of the male is demonstrated, and the weaker role of the female affirmed”.²³ According to Goffman, both men and women are performers in the society and both of them perform certain disciplines, which are moulded by social expectations and therefore become socially accepted. In the case mentioned by Goffman, the social expectations not only concern men’s and women’s typical character, but also involve the relation between dominant masculine power and subordinate feminine power.

A Dutch social psychologist, Geert Hofstede, who is famous for his pioneering research on cultures across modern groups, organisations and nations, develops six dimensions to assess and distinguish cultures in different modern societies and one of the six dimensions is masculinity-femininity.²⁴ In his book *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, Hofstede explains the masculine gender role model in the way that echoes Goffman’s. By taking the 1986 U. S. movie *Lucas* as an

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1971), 65.

²² Ibid, 48.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, (New York: Mc Graw Hill, 2010), 138.

example, Hofstede exemplifies the masculine model by describing boys' and girls' "rightful roles": boys "fight while playing football" and girls "stand adoringly and adorably by on the sidelines as cheerleaders".²⁵ Furthermore, Hofstede points out that each society has its sexual norm, and "[m]asculine countries tend to maintain different standards for men and for women: men are the subjects, women the objects. ... Feminine cultures tend to maintain a single standard – equally strict or equally loose – for both sexes ...".²⁶ In other words, a society dominated by masculine power could be recognised as a masculine society, and the masculine power structure is founded on the binary hierarchy; while the feminine power structure does not indicate a strategy that women will replace men to occupy the dominant or subject position, but implies the rejection of the different standards for men and women, or the binary hierarchy between sexes.

Hofstede establishes his masculine-feminine framework on the base of his investigation of male and female characteristics in a general sense, as he states in his book that "[m]ale achievement reinforces masculine assertiveness and competition; female care reinforces feminine nurturance and concern for relationships and for the living environment".²⁷ According to Hofstede, in a masculine society, "men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned", while in a feminine society, "both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life".²⁸ This suggests that a masculine society is constructed as valuing material success and achieving the best in the society, while a feminine society is

²⁵ Ibid., 156.

²⁶ Ibid., 157.

²⁷ Ibid., 138.

²⁸ Ibid., 140.

characterised by norms such as caring for others and pursuing the average rather than highlighting divisions between the dominant and the subordinate.

Eunuchs in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films could be defined as masculine roles, since they are usually portrayed as having a dominant position in the political system and great achievement in martial arts skills; and the stories in which these eunuchs appear as key villains could be mostly categorised as being in a masculine model, because the main storyline is typically based on a theme such as fighting for power, or the conflict between the dominant and the subordinate. However, over the years, the theme of fighting for power has undergone a series of changes. Currently, although powerful eunuchs are still important aspects of Hong Kong films, the main storyline has begun to deviate from the theme of power conflict. Power hunting is not the sole goal of eunuchs. This deviation suggests that, as a token of lack and loss, eunuchs are expected to find other means to compensate for their lack in different times. How the storyline shifts, why such a transformation happens and whether this transformation displays a feminine model (or not) are important research objectives of this study. Besides, by examining these different ways in which powerful eunuchs are conceived, different attitudes towards the power structure of Hong Kong society in different times may be revealed. On this point, the depiction of eunuchs in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films over the past half century could be an ideal barometer to examine the culture dimension of Hong Kong.

1.2.4 Social expectations in biological masculinities and femininities

The exploration of masculinity and femininity is, in most cases, based on the public's expectations of men and women's social roles. However, it is not only the social roles that are rooted in the social expectations, but also men and women's

biological traits and sex division. What is taken as a natural sexual feature could also be regarded as being constructed according to social expectations. Eunuchs' sexual and biological traits that have appeared in films as well as in historical records can be viewed as an invention, rather than a natural representation of castration.

Sex, in various contexts, is believed to belong to the biological matrix and precedes social expectations. In other words, sex is always associated with nature while gender is always linked to culture; or sex is unconstructed and prior to cultural impact while gender is constructed and influenced by cultural norms. Judith Butler points out the problem of such division between sex and gender and discusses it at the beginning of her work *Gender Trouble*. In her opinion, "sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along".²⁹ That is to say, sex is also constructed by society and culture, just like gender. Butler borrows de Beauvoir's words, "the body is a situation", to reject the notion of sex as "a prediscursive anatomical facticity".³⁰ She also reveals the problem of sex by querying the duality of sex. According to Butler, most scientific discourses, which always seek to prove the duality of sex, are problematic, since they are always "in the service of other political and social interests".³¹ Therefore it is more rational to understand sex as a constructed situation, rather than a stable pre-given role.

Eunuch characters' masculinity or femininity is embodied in both their sexual appearance and their gender roles as analysed above. Due to their emasculated condition, they are likely to be feminised in their appearance, and this tendency can easily be found in historical records and in films. Apparently, feminising eunuchs'

²⁹ Butler, *Gender trouble*, 12.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 10.

appearance is in line with the biological requirement. However, it is more rational to understand such feminisation as a manner of social expectation rather than a biological truth. In Hong Kong's *wuxia* films, castration does not necessarily cause a feminine appearance. On the one hand, not all directors choose to feminise eunuchs' looks. On the other, even if they choose to do so, in different times, the ways of feminising eunuchs' appearance are quite different. These differences directly show that the gender of eunuchs, in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films, is something created.

The exploration of eunuchs' sexual traits in films does not limit this thesis to theorising about the eunuchs' physical conditions. Rather, the investigation of how their gender is symbolised in different times will be the basis of the examination of different power structures; as Butler suggests, the body could be viewed as a situation, and how to construct the body is always in the service of certain "political and social interests".³²

1.2.5 The masculine and the feminine: two logics rather than two descriptive gender items

In order to examine the cultural transformation of Hong Kong society, this thesis will use the concepts masculinity and femininity to analyse different power structures in different periods, as the preceding part has suggested. Such an analysis focuses mainly on the gender implications of the masculine and the feminine, as they are drawn from the social expectations for men and women. Apart from their gender connotations, the concepts of masculine and feminine could also be treated as two logics.

³² Ibid.

Baudrillard extends the masculine and the feminine from two descriptive gender categories to two models – the masculine model and the feminine model. They are first presented as two logics in his work *The Consumer Society: Myths & Structures*.³³ Baudrillard uses them to analyse consumer society and clearly points out that these two models “are the product not of the *differentiated* nature of the sexes, but of the differential logic of the system”.³⁴ The manner of citing the masculine and the feminine as two logics rather than gender characteristics could also be found in Butler’s work. According to Butler, the masculine signifies the dualistic pattern, while the feminine marks one of diversity.³⁵ This way of comprehending masculine and feminine is also founded in the general understanding of the social expectations for men and women.

De Beauvoir points out that, “man never thinks of himself without thinking of the Other; he views the world under the sign of duality”.³⁶ Meanwhile, “in truth women have never set up female values in opposition to male values; it is man who, desirous of maintaining masculine prerogatives, has invented that divergence.”³⁷ Butler further explains the concept of women and the difference between feminine strategy and masculine mechanism. She states:

Women are also a “difference” that cannot be understood as the simple negation or “Other” of the always-already-masculine subject. ..., they are neither the

³³ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 96-98.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Butler, *Gender trouble*, 12.

³⁶ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 73.

³⁷ Ibid., 69.

subject nor its Other, but a difference from the economy of binary opposition, itself a ruse for monologic elaboration of the masculine.³⁸

Both de Beauvoir and Butler suggest that it is men who have to live according to a distinctive identity and set up their logic of binary opposition; women, different from men, are therefore categorised as the “other” in men’s dualistic doctrine. In other words, it is men who have to distinguish themselves by “othering” the different; while women’s tolerance prevents them from living according to this distinction and allows them the openness for divergence and discrepancy.

Baudrillard has also sketched a vivid picture to draw the connotations of masculine and feminine models from the “imaginary” “organic representation” of men and women.³⁹ He has not shown direct criticism of sex as a natural category; however, the terms “imaginary” and “organic representation” already disclose his doubt about the facticity of anatomical sex. According to Baudrillard, the masculine incarnates “all the schemes of erectility, verticality, ascendancy, growth, production”, and “intermittency”, and could be “retractile or aleatory”.⁴⁰ The feminine, however represents the “female quality of being available at will”, and “*utopian* continuity”.⁴¹ In sum, the masculine model features dualism and centres on motifs such as “univocal and hegemonic discourse” and “phallogocentrism”, while the feminine model symbolises the difference which appears outside the binary matrix and frames “a site of subversive multiplicity”.⁴²

³⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 25.

³⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 26

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 25.

What does a world look like if it is governed by a masculine logic? Generally speaking, so-called civilised society had long been governed by the phallogocentrism and patriarchal order, which belong to a masculine logic. In contemporary times, such an order has also exerted strong influence. Laura Mulvey has revealed the operation of this order by analysing the popular Hollywood movies. She identified the patriarchal discourse and male dominance by revealing the male-active and female-passive gaze relationship.⁴³ Mulvey's method will be applied in this thesis to discern eunuchs' gender status in different gaze relationships. Moreover, the investigation of the gaze structure will be not only restricted to sexual relation between eunuchs and women, but also extended to power relations between eunuchs and other roles, such as their lords and their subordinates. The power relations built up by gazing and being gazed at have also been revealed by Michel Foucault, who uses the example of panopticon to describe "the seeing/being seen dyad".⁴⁴ He suggests that in this mechanism, "[p]ower has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes".⁴⁵

Applying Mulvey and Foucault's thoughts to the study of the construction of eunuchs, this thesis will focus not only on eunuchs as gazers or objects of the gaze, but also on how directors portray the gaze dyad. Depicting eunuchs in gazing/being gazed at structures is an important way of displaying their status and power. Eunuchs could be masculinised or empowered for being endowed with the position to gaze; conversely, they could be feminised for being gazed at. However, no matter whether eunuchs are gazing or gazed at, they are parts of a gaze dyad pattern. In her work

⁴³ Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 58-69.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: A Division of Random House, 1977), 201-202.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 202

Gender Trouble, Butler emphasises that the inversion of the subject and the object will not subvert the “monologic elaboration of the masculine”.⁴⁶ The dyad gaze pattern forms an elementary approach to construct the relations between eunuchs and other roles in most cases. However, in different periods, the way the gaze dyad is presented varies in different contexts. Directors show different standpoints towards the gaze dyad. They adopt different points of view to depict a gaze dyad. For instance, sometimes directors stand by the side of eunuchs, while in other occasions they choose the viewpoint of other characters. These different points of view may reveal a transformation of the masculine power structure.

In addition to the gaze dyad, the masculine dualistic logic, as suggested by Foucault, also governs a society by creating binary divisions which involve “mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal” and so on.⁴⁷ In this thesis, his theory will also be applied to eunuch characters who were depicted as abnormal when they were first depicted in film.⁴⁸ In light of Foucault’s theory, this research will go on to explore why these roles were composed as abnormal, and on what grounds such a construction has been challenged. These investigations will, in turn, prompt an examination of the shift between masculine model and feminine model in Hong Kong society’s culture dimension.

⁴⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 25.

⁴⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 199.

⁴⁸ Early in the 1967 when the eunuch prototype was created, he was depicted by the director King Hu as mentally abnormal due to his sexual impotency. See, Koichi Yamada and Koyo Udagawa, *A Touch of King Hu/Hu Jinquan wu xia dian ying zuo fa* (胡金銓武俠電影作法), trans. Li He and Ma Songzhi (Hong Kong: Zheng wen she, 1998), 198. Hu’s opinion reveals that the physical condition of the eunuch is constructed according to his imagination, since a eunuch is not absolutely impotent in sex, or he is not always mentally abnormal. It is because a eunuch is, in most cases, expected to be so, that leads to the situation that he is depicted as abnormal in most films.

How does a world governed by a feminine logic be organised? According to Baudrillard, “the feminine is not what opposes the masculine”.⁴⁹ Such a statement seems contrary to common sense, because the masculine and the feminine are always deemed to be a pair of binary oppositions. In his *Seduction*, Baudrillard explains “the masculine/feminine opposition” in a different layer.⁵⁰ Like de Beauvoir and Butler, Baudrillard defines such an opposition as “essentially masculine”.⁵¹ Also in his *Seduction*, the feminine is identified as a strategy which “causes the sexual poles to waver. It is not the pole opposed to masculinity, but abolishes the differential opposition”.⁵²

Furthermore, Baudrillard clearly claims that “all masculine power is a power to produce. All that is produced, be it the production of woman as female, falls within the register of masculine power”, while the “strength of the feminine is that of seduction”.⁵³ As suggested by Baudrillard, seduction is, in fact, a force which could bring the “structure inversion” towards the dualistic masculine pattern.⁵⁴ Sadie Plant has talked about “Baudrillard’s woman” and elaborated the concept of seduction further:

Seduction is more than the identification of a new force of production in the world, just as appearance is in more than diametrical relation to the real. Not even merely the unproductive, it is that which ‘is never “produced”, is never

⁴⁹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 7.

⁵² Ibid., 12.

⁵³ Ibid., 15 & 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

found where it is produced' (pp.7-8) and as much forever eludes the discourse of production....⁵⁵

Through the analyses of mechanisms of seduction and production, Plant depicts a structural inversion which marks the fundamental difference between the masculine model and the feminine model. Just as Butler mentions in her work, the switch from the masculine to the feminine does not indicate a "reverse-discourse", which just "uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor", but rather offers "a different set of terms".⁵⁶ In other words, such inversion does not concern the replacement of subjects and objects, but rather implies a substitution of a new structure.

This is also why the examination of eunuch construction should not stop at discovering their roles as subjects or objects, both of which are representations of the same logic system. Given the discovery of their different roles, on what grounds could these different roles be shaped? This deserves more attention. For instance, eunuchs may be portrayed as objects of the gaze for different reasons. These might rest on an intention to overturn the traditional power structure according to which the powerful eunuchs should always be the subjects of the gaze; or they might simply be a strategy to attract the public gaze. The former pattern focuses more on reversing the discourse, rather than replacing the dualistic structure, while the latter pattern may show the strength of seduction, rather than the strategy of binary opposition.

With the dualistic model as the core, the scheme of the masculine is designated with the motif of "determination"; with the pluralistic model as the nucleus, the

⁵⁵ Sadie Plant, "Baudrillard's Woman: the Eve of Seduction", *Forget Baudrillard?*, ed. Chris Rojek and Bryan S. Turner (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 89.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 19.

feminine is associated with the subject of “indetermination”.⁵⁷ “In the sexual mythology”, the transition from the masculine model to the feminine model marks “the end of the determinate representation of sex” and “the flotation of the law that regulates the difference between the sexes”.⁵⁸ Due to eunuchs’ sexual nature being neither normally male nor typically female, these characters can be viewed as a token of gender ambiguity which, in different periods, could be conceived differently. For instance, their sexual ambiguity may be treated as a problem in one context, while it may not be in another condition. What should be borne in mind is that eunuchs’ sexual ambiguity is always derived from the strict law that organises sexual difference. Without the reference of rigorous sexual difference, eunuchs’ sex would not be viewed as a symbol of ambiguity. In other words, the determination of the dualistic sex law underlines the problem of sexual ambiguity, while the flotation of the law may create more flexibility to represent the diversity of sex and release eunuchs from that problematic ambiguity. In a nutshell, a feminine model allows more space for the difference, which perhaps has been stamped as the abnormal, the evil or the other in a masculine model. The strategy of the feminine may not turn the abnormal into normal, turn evil into good, or turn the other into the subject; however, it may bestow upon the abnormal a chance to defend itself, and prompt the comprehension of their evil. In the 1960s, eunuchs in Hong Kong’s *wuxia* films were directly defined as abnormal and their inner world was given no depiction. Conversely, in the early 2010s, eunuchs were portrayed as having the emotions of normal people. This research will investigate such a transformation, and then explore the possible shift between the masculine mechanism and feminine strategy in the cultural dimension of Hong Kong society.

⁵⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

1.3 Methodology and Outlines

The main methods adopted in this research are case studies and textual analysis.

The criteria of choosing the research cases are as follows:

- Films must be directed or co-directed by Hong Kong directors and produced or co-produced by Hong Kong's film companies.
- Films must be in Cantonese or Mandarin.
- Films must be in *wuxia* genre.
- Films must have eunuchs in key roles. (In Hong Kong's *wuxia* films, eunuchs have scarcely ever been portrayed as protagonists; on the contrary, they are always depicted as antagonists, specifically villains. In this case, the requirement that they take key roles implies that eunuchs have to be the most important antagonists in the films.)

Besides these criteria, the development and variations of Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre in the past half century is also relevant to film selection. When eunuch Cao was created, Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre also reached its zenith. Together with King Hu Jiquan (胡金銓, 1932 – 1997), directors such as Chang Cheh (张彻), Chu Yuan (楚原) and Lau Kar-leung (刘家良) made the 1960s and 1970s a remarkable period for Hong Kong's *wuxia* films. Since Hu invented the classic eunuch character type, Cao Shaoqin (曹少钦), in 1967, Hong Kong directors thereafter followed this prototype and created a number of vicious eunuchs with great political power and superb martial arts skills. Most eunuch characters created in this period were almost copies of eunuch Cao.

As time moved on to the 1980s, this genre had shown a dormant period with a very limited number of productions. As a consequence, very few eunuchs were depicted in this period. However, even though there were so few eunuch figures, they were obviously different in appearance and character from their previous counterparts. Such differences became more striking and typical in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which is the golden age for Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre, and also for Hong Kong's film industry as a whole. Tsui Hark (徐克), Ching Siu-tung (程小东), Raymond Lee (李惠民) as well as other directors became world renowned for their noteworthy contribution to the *wuxia* genre. Correspondingly, eunuch characters were included at an unprecedented rate in this period.

After the golden age, the production of Hong Kong's *wuxia* films, and even of Hong Kong films as a whole, declined in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As a result, eunuch characters almost disappeared from view. When Hong Kong directors regained their interest in the depiction of eunuchs, it was already in the early 2010s, after Ang Lee's *wuxia* film *Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon* (2000) had won him a great reputation in Hollywood, and also after Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) had exerted a great influence on the Chinese *wuxia* genre as a whole. From the mid-2000s to early 2010s, Hong Kong directors' enthusiasm for the *wuxia* genre gradually returned, and a number of impressive *wuxia* films and eunuch characters were made.

From these facts, it is not hard to find that, since Hu's invention of the eunuch Cao, every time when Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre enters a period of prosperity, the construction of eunuchs also becomes active. It is not an exaggeration to say that the

development of eunuch images is a barometer of the progression of Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre.

Along these lines, films with eunuchs in key roles will be divided into three groups according to the growth of Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre. In chronological order, the three groups are distributed in three historical periods: the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s and the early 2010s. In each period, eunuch figures have shown their distinguishing stage characteristics, which are exactly what this thesis will explore. Accordingly, this research will closely examine two to four films in each group, those which were the most popular ones in regard to box office success, fame of director and typicality of eunuch in his respective era.

This thesis consists of six chapters in total. The first chapter provides an overview of the thesis, mainly clarifying the research objectives, displaying the theoretical framework, encapsulating the main ideas of each chapter and explaining keywords of the research. In this chapter, especially in the theoretical parts, the implications of the masculine and the feminine have been demonstrated typically with regard to gender and cultural aspects. The gender and cultural connotations of these two terms will play a crucial role in guiding this research. However, it is not completely unproblematic to apply them to the study of the Chinese eunuch images in *wuxia* films, since most *wuxia* stories are closely associated with traditional Chinese culture and most eunuch characters are drawn from eunuch figures in history. The implications of the masculine and the feminine vary in different contexts. As analysed above, in the traditional Chinese context, masculine and feminine, which are marked as *yang* and *yin* respectively, may exhibit meanings contrary to their implications in a modern western context. How to deal with this problem and how to rationalise the

application of masculine and feminine to the traditional Chinese images are questions that require an exploration of *yin* and *yang*, which will be expounded in the following chapter.

Chapter Two will centre on two motifs. One concerns the implications of *yin* and *yang*. The other concerns the Chinese eunuchs and their roles in the *yin-yang* discourse. Regarding the problem mentioned in Chapter One, the exploration of *yin* and *yang* will focus on their similarity to and distance from masculine and feminine, rather than extending to all potential usages of them, since the purpose of introducing *yin* and *yang* in this research is to complement the application of masculine and feminine in a study of Chinese context. Likewise, *yin* and *yang* will also be described in two layers. In the one layer, they could be viewed as two models which show connotations similar to the masculine and the feminine. In the other layer, where they are adopted as descriptive items, they will be treated as two evolving concepts, and their applications vary in different periods. In modern times, their connotations have been largely influenced by the western notions of masculine and feminine, especially in the context of gender. It is more rational to view the construction of eunuchs' gendered roles in Hong Kong films as largely being based on their modern implication of *yin* and *yang*, rather than on their less popular traditional conception.

In addition, Chapter Two will briefly introduce the history of Chinese eunuchs and social function. The focus of this part will be the issue of how eunuchs' gendered roles were conceived in ancient society, rather than revealing their biological and mental predicament, since that is a prerequisite for investigating how eunuchs and their gendered roles are constructed in films. These traditional perceptions of eunuchs profoundly influence the portrayal of their filmic images.

The close analysis of eunuch images in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films will be introduced in Chapter Three, which will mainly be devoted to an observation of the eunuch prototype created by director King Hu in 1967. He intentionally masculinises this character in every manner. However, it is not hard to deduce that Hu is a man with a firm faith in traditional Chinese culture. In this case, his intention to masculinise the eunuch deserves more investigation, since eunuchs were always portrayed as feminised figures in traditional culture. Using detailed textual analysis, the chapter will further examine Hu's understanding of eunuchs' gender. With reference to Foucault's research on the gaze, this chapter will examine Hu's standpoint regarding power structure when he composed this powerful eunuch. After Hu successfully invented the eunuch prototype, directors in this period always mimicked his way of masculinising the eunuch characters. Therefore, Chapter Three also involves investigation of other Hong Kong's *wuxia* films, with eunuchs in key roles, made in the 1960s and 1970s.

Chapter Four will review the impressive eunuch characters composed in Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre during the 1980s and 1990s. With the exception of their appearance, these eunuchs inherited their most typical features from their preceding counterparts. In the 1960s and 1970s, eunuch characters in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films were uniformly masculinised in their appearance, while in the following period they were conspicuously feminised. They could also be viewed as being feminised in that they were typically portrayed as being gazed at in the 1980s and 1990s. However, by attaching feminine signs, such as red lips, polished nails, and female voices, to men, such feminisation made eunuchs look odd, rather than contributing to the pleasure of gazing. Therefore, this chapter will initiate an exploration to identify the underlying motives of the directors in this period who chose to depict eunuchs as gaze objects but

bestowed little visual attraction on them. What, then, was the real function of feminising eunuchs as gaze objects was? This question will be a key research question of this chapter.

Chapter Five will deal with eunuch images in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films made in the early 2010s. In this period, typical feminine signs and masculine features became less conspicuous. Nonetheless, eunuchs' relations with women were given more elaboration than before. Therefore, examining eunuchs' gendered roles in their contacts with women forms the primary task of this chapter. Further on, this chapter will also question the power structure formed by gaze. In addition, by citing Baudrillard and Roland Barthes, new methods in conveying eunuchs' relations with women will be explored.

1.4 Terminology

In addition to the concepts – masculine, feminine, *yin* and *yang* – other terms, such as Hong Kong film, *wuxia* genre and Chinese eunuchs, which are also key terms in this study, should be clarified before textual analyses. This section will centre on the definitions of these concepts and will verify their applicability in this study.

1.4.1 Hong Kong film

Prior to studying the transformation of Hong Kong films during the past half century, it is necessary to discuss two matters. Firstly, what is Hong Kong film? Secondly, has Hong Kong film died after Hong Kong's reunion with China in 1997?

If a simple definition of Hong Kong film is required, it should be that the film is directed and produced by Hong Kong filmmakers. However, the term Hong Kong filmmaker is itself a questionable concept. It is hard to find a clear boundary to separate a pure Hong Kong director from others. Moreover, so-called Hong Kong film always has a hybrid element. In other words, hybridity is typical of Hong Kong film.

Evidently, a large number of celebrated Hong Kong filmmakers were, in fact, neither born nor raised in Hong Kong. The most conspicuous examples exist among those representative Hong Kong directors who are still active in filmmaking. Tsui Hark (徐克) was born in Vietnam and went to Hong Kong when he was 16 years old; Peter Chan (陈可辛) was born in Hong Kong, yet migrated to Thailand when he was 8 years old and grew up there; John Woo (吴宇森), Wang Kar-wai (王家卫), Ann Hui (许鞍华) Gordon Chan (陈嘉上), and Fruit Chan (陈果) were born in Mainland China. Moreover, most of them have experiences of studying or filming in the Western countries, and started to gain their reputations in filmmaking in Hong Kong around the period of Hong Kong's first New Wave movement in the late 1970s and 1980s. Strictly speaking, these directors' Hong Kong identities seem undefined.

Nevertheless, it is easy to find that the preceding Hong Kong filmmakers have more relevance to and a deeper connection with societies and cultures outside Hong Kong. For instance, the most important directors in the 1960s and 1970s, such as King Hu (胡金铨), Chang Cheh (张彻), Li Han-hsiang (李翰祥), and Lau Kar-Leung (刘家良), received their education in Mainland China and were profoundly influenced by traditional Chinese culture. Meantime, Bruce Lee (李小龙), who is remembered as the one who brought Hong Kong films a worldwide acclaim, had a deep attachment to western culture. Besides, from the 1930s to the 1960s, numerous outstanding

filmmakers left Mainland China for Hong Kong due to business expansion, the Second World War and strict film censorship in Mainland China, as well as ideological differences. In addition, when Hong Kong's film industry was still in its rudimentary stage before the 1930s, and especially around the 1910s, financial and technical support from western societies played a crucial role. The first Hong Kong film, the silent short *Stealing the Roast Duck* (偷烧鸭, 1909), were financed and produced by the American businessman Benjamin Brodsky (1877 - 1960).⁵⁹ Moreover, the first Hong Kong-produced short *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife* (庄子试妻, 1913) was dependent on Brodsky's support.⁶⁰ To make this film, he cooperated with director Lai Man-Wei (黎民伟, 1893 - 1953) – “Father of Hong Kong Cinema” – who “was born in Japan and educated from childhood in two of Hong Kong's best-known English language colleges”.⁶¹ Generally speaking, from its infancy to the 2010s, Hong Kong film always was a hybrid.

Hong Kong films are a combination of diverse cultures. Hong Kong filmmakers do not have to be born or educated there. However, most of those who are widely accepted as Hong Kong filmmakers have at least one thing in common. They have devoted most of their filmmaking lives to Hong Kong, or they have earned their reputations in filmmaking there. Even though they have left Hong Kong and continue their filmmaking in other regions or countries, they may still be deemed to be Hong Kong filmmakers. For instance, King Hu and John Woo are generally labelled as Hong Kong directors in various works about Hong Kong film, even though Hu left

⁵⁹ Lisa Odham Stokes, *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007), xxx.

⁶⁰ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.), 48-50.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 48 - 51.

Hong Kong for Taiwan in 1966 and made films there for several decades, and Woo is also famous for directing Hollywood films in the United States. Therefore, it is the experience of filmmaking in Hong Kong, which influences and is identifiable in their works that distinguishes them as Hong Kong filmmakers.

Moreover, the above situation of hybridity and flexible identity of Hong Kong films and directors has continued in more recent times. This is because, with greater cooperation, which began to flourish in the 1980s and 1990s films made in Hong Kong, Taiwan or Mainland China, as well as other places, an increase in the number of Hong Kong films made outside Hong Kong has been inevitable. In other words, Hong Kong filmmakers, even those who were born and grew up in Hong Kong, obtained more opportunities to earn their reputations in making films outside Hong Kong. This situation is one reason for the supposed death of Hong Kong films after Hong Kong's return to China in 1997.

Early in 1995, "The Death of Hong Kong" was pronounced in an article in the multinational business magazine *Fortune*.⁶² The handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty was claimed to be a disaster for Hong Kong. Also in 1995, the characters "香港电影之死", "the death of Hong Kong films", appeared as a cover title in a Hong Kong magazine *Ming Pao Monthly*.⁶³ The senior film critic Lieh Fu (列孚, also named Wang Kainan, 王凯南), who was then the deputy editor-in-chief, focused on the decadence of Hong Kong cinema after its flourishing around the early 1990s, and promoted a discussion on this subject. Hong Kong cinema, in general, around the

⁶² Louis Kraar and Joe McGowan, "The Death of Hong Kong", *archive.fortune.com*, 26 June. 1995, accessed 1 May. 2016.
http://archive.fortune.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/1995/06/26/203948/index.htm

⁶³ Lie Fu Wang Kainan, "Rigidities of Hong Kong Cinema in the Circumstances of Unilateralism – The Studies of the Decadence of Hong Kong cinema" (单边主义让香港电影固步自封 – 香港电影陷入低谷研究), *Film Art*, 1 (2007), 113. Print.

mid-1990s, were appraised by him as losing their creativity, new talents, genre variety and market.⁶⁴ These limitations put the brakes on the development of Hong Kong film industry; and they even keep affecting today's Hong Kong films, some of which are called co-productions.

After 1997, the Hong Kong film industry faced a general trend to increase its cooperation with the film industry of Mainland China, especially after the signing of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) in 2003. Under the circumstances of cooperation, the Hong Kong film industry directly accessed an enormous market in Mainland China.⁶⁵ However, the price was that they had to dilute some of the distinctive Hong Kong characteristics, such as ghosts, violence, and pornographic content, which were typical pre-1997 Hong Kong features, so as to pass the censor in Mainland China. As a result, even though Hong Kong films made decent box office profits in Mainland China, “港片不港”, which can literally be interpreted as “Hong Kong films without Hong Kong distinctiveness”, has become the consensus view of these Hong Kong films released in Mainland China cinemas. Thus, the question, whether Hong Kong films have died or not, is still a general concern.

In this research, co-productions made after 1997 which have Hong Kong filmmakers involved as directors and producers are included for studying the development and transformation of Hong Kong films. This practice is based on the opinion that Hong Kong films have not died and that co-productions are one important form of Hong Kong films in the new century. The reason for including

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Weifang Zhao, *The Rheological History of Hong Kong's Film Industry* (香港电影产业流变) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2008), 151-155.

them as Hong Kong films is partly that, hybridity, which has been discussed above, has been an invariably typical feature of Hong Kong film since its infancy.

Besides, co-productions are the inevitable outcome of the development of Hong Kong films. Because of the change of market demand, Hong Kong films have to be adapted to meet the needs of the audience outside Hong Kong. As a consequence, the Hong Kong manner of telling a story may be modified. This being the case, it is natural that some people conclude that Hong Kong film is dead. However, what Hong Kong filmmakers have tried to do on their tour north to a big market does not oppose their customary practice. Market priority has always been an outstanding characteristic of Hong Kong film; and the adaptation to a new market demand is not contrary to the usual strategy of Hong Kong films. In addition, co-production is not only determined by a continually expanding film market, but also by the survival rule in this fast-changing world. The rise and fall of different genres in Hong Kong film history, and even the dialect shift between Mandarin and Cantonese, have already proven that Hong Kong film itself requires its own adjustment of Hong Kong characteristics.

Restoring the golden age might not only be a dream of Hong Kong people, but also a wish of all fans of Hong Kong movies. One strong sentiment in the criticism of Hong Kong cinema's losing its Hong Kong characteristics is the lament for Hong Kong's ghost films, which were typical and successful in the 1980s and 1990s and remained a valid genre until the beginning of 2000s. However, ghost films are only one particular genre of the films of Hong Kong's golden age, and the genre itself should not be thought of as the only one that is typical of Hong Kong; moreover, Hong Kong characteristics are not merely "all too extravagant" and "too gratuitously

wild”.⁶⁶ Right from its beginning in the 1910s to the 1990s, there have been different representative features of different periods of Hong Kong cinema. For example, from the 1950s black-and-white tear-jerker romances, to the Shaw Brother’s martial arts films, to the kung fu comedies of Jackie Chan from the late 1970s, to the gangster films in the 1990s, each period has its unique features and popular genres. Nevertheless, they are all widely recognised as “Hong Kong” films. The true Hong Kong characteristic is not pure in its colour. It has always evolved with time and change, socially, culturally and politically.

Moreover, as argued before, genre is only one aspect of Hong Kong film. The subject matter is even more important. Peter Chan, in a 2014 interview, stated that recently a group of Hong Kong directors had started to re-focus on Hong Kong’s local market and tried to restore the typical Hong Kong characteristics in their films.⁶⁷ In a 2012 column, which reviewed Hong Kong films during the past fifteen years since Hong Kong’s return, published by The Chinese University Press of Hong Kong, Dr. Chan Ka-ming emphasises that Hong Kong films have not died.⁶⁸ He argues that Hong Kong’s filmmakers’ technical abilities, such as their expertise in computer generated imagery, action design and so on, have displayed and extended the vitality of Hong Kong films in various co-productions, not only with Mainland China, but also with other regions and countries.

⁶⁶ David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1.

⁶⁷ Yaru Yang, “Comments: Ten Years after CEPA: The Disappearance, Resurrection and Evolution of Hong Kong’s Film Genre” (评论: CEPA 十年 香港类型片的消失、复苏与进化), *1905.com*. 2 April. 2014, accessed 1 May. 2016. <http://www.1905.com/news/20140402/745700.shtml>

⁶⁸ Ka-ming Chan, “Hong Kong Films Have not Died”, *15 Years after Return: Special Column for Hong Kong Films* ed. Huang Ailing (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2012), 16-25.

In summary, in different periods, Hong Kong films show different characteristics. Peter Chan points out that even though today's Hong Kong directors focus only on the local matter and market, and endeavour to restore typical Hong Kong characteristics, today's Hong Kong characteristics cannot be the Hong Kong characteristics of the past, due to the different states of Hong Kong society and different mindsets of filmmakers.⁶⁹

1.4.2 *Wuxia* genre

The second issue that should be addressed concerns the definition of *wuxia* films. The term *wuxia* is often confused with its synonyms, including martial arts, swordplay, kung fu, action, or *wuda* (武打) and *wushu* (武术) in Chinese. Scholars, such as Stephen Teo, Leon Hunt, David Desser, David Bordwell, Chen Mo and Jia Leilei have done an extensive amount of research on the films labelled as above. Moreover, they have endeavoured to sort out their different scope as well as the relations between them.

In this thesis, the direct reason for choosing the term *wuxia* rather than the others is that the other terms – martial arts, swordplay, kung fu, action, *wuda* and *wushu* – place a more intensive weight on the connotations of *wu*, which can be literally translated as martial arts or military force. The composite term *wuxia* invokes both the spirit of *wu*, the aim of practising *wu*, along with becoming a *xia*, an upright knight-errant who practises the *xia* spirit, the code of chivalry which involves a strong sense of justice and of helping the weak. This interpretation of *wuxia* is consistent with the description given by Chang Cheh (张彻, 1923 - 2002), the “Godfather of Hong Kong cinema”, who directed nearly a hundred films, mainly in the swordplay and kung fu

⁶⁹ Yang, “Comments: Ten Years after CEPA”.

genres. He states that “[a]s its name implies, the martial arts (wu xia) use the notion of martial arts (wu) to express the content of chivalry (xia).”⁷⁰

The term *xia* signifies a person and an ideal. Who is a *xia*? Or what is the *xia* spirit? As a person, the *xia* was initially defined as a man who refuses to be bound to laws and tends to break laws by applying *wu*.⁷¹ This definition exists in the work of philosopher Han Fei (韩非, c.280 – 230BC) in the Warring States period (470 – 221BC). During the Western Han Dynasty (202BC – 8AD), Sima Qian (司马迁), the father of Chinese historiography, continues to describe the *xia* as one who may break laws easily. This description is found in his *Records of the Grand Historian* (《史记》)⁷² Moreover, besides this characteristic, Sima emphasises that the *xia* has a series of merits – trustworthiness, honour to his promise, selflessness and readiness to help others.⁷³ These universal values constitute the important features of the *xia* himself, and gradually become the core of the concept of *xia*.

Two thousand years later, the typical characteristics of *xia* have not changed. What has changed is that although the *xia* is usually portrayed as someone standing outside dictatorship or in opposition to it, he or she is not typically constructed as being antagonistic towards laws or social rules. Louis Cha Leung-yung (查良镛/金

⁷⁰ Cheh Chang, “Creating the Martial Arts Film and the Hong Kong Cinema Style”, *The Making of Martial Arts Films ---- As Told by Filmmakers and Stars* (电影口述历史展览之《再见江湖》), edited by Winnie Fu, presented by the Provisional Urban Council and organised by the Hong Kong Film Archive (Hong Kong: Xianggang dianying ziliaoguan, 1999), 19.

⁷¹ Chinese original: 韩非, 《五蠹》: “儒以文乱法, 侠以武犯禁, 而人主兼礼之, 此所以乱也”。 English translation: Han Fei, “Five Vermin”: “The literati by means of letters disturbed laws, the cavaliers by means of weapons transgressed prohibitions. Yet the lord of men respects them both. That is the reason why disorder prevails.” This translation is quoted from “Five Vermin: A Pathological Analysis of Politics”, *The Complete Works of Han Fei Tzŭ: A Classic of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 2, trans. W. K. Liao (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1959), 285.

⁷² See Qian Sima, Bibliographies of Knight-errants (游侠列传), *Records of the Grand Historian* (史记) annotates. Zhaoqi Han (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 271-283.

⁷³ Ibid.

庸), the best-known modern Chinese *wuxia* novelist, has created a series of impressive *xia* characters, and these figures have affected several generations in the establishment of their personal values. Cha's description of *xia* forms a representative modern understanding of this notion. In his works, the conflict between *xia* and the law has been greatly diminished. Besides, he suggests that the merit of *xia* involves not simply helping the weak; more importantly, *xia* at a higher spiritual level should have a national sentiment which is expressed as a sense of patriotism and responsibility for the people.⁷⁴ For a person who is *xia* or has the *xia* spirit, *wu* is an important quality in the fulfilment of their pursuit. But this does not mean that a person cannot become a *xia* without the ability to practise *wu*. *Xia* could be understood as a kind of spirit that everyone may have, just as *wu* is a kind of means that everyone may practise, even though he or she might be an evil character.

Given the above introduction to the concepts of *wu*, *xia* and their relationships, films that involve the typical elements of both *wu* and *xia* will be counted as *wuxia* films. The *wuxia* films selected for this research are not necessarily *wuxia* films in a restricted or narrow sense. Strictly, *wuxia* is synonymous with swordplay. Stephen Teo (张建德), claims that "since *wuxia* refers to a *specific* martial arts genre, it therefore refers to a type of film which portrays the warrior *xia* and his or her style of swordfighting action as well as the themes and principles of *xia* (chivalry or knight-errantry)".⁷⁵ In order to elaborate the connotations of *wuxia* as a cinematic genre, Teo

⁷⁴ Chinese original: 金庸, 《神雕侠侣》第二十回: “侠之大者, 为国为民”。
English translation: Louis Cha, *Divine Eagle, Gallant Knight/The Return of Condor Heroes*, Chapter Twenty: “*xia* at a higher spiritual level should have a national sentiment which is expressed as a sense of patriotism and responsibility for the people”. Translation mine.

⁷⁵ Stephen Teo, *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Wuxia Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2009), 4.

differentiates between *wuxia* and kung genres in a number of specificities.⁷⁶ For instance, he points out that the sword-wielding tradition derives from Wudang – a northern school of martial arts skills – while the fist-fighting style has roots in Shaolin, which is a southern school.⁷⁷ Besides, “the nature of *wuxia* is more abstract and philosophical in terms of its application of concepts such as chivalry, altruism, justice and righteousness, while kung fu apparently emphasises the *actual and pragmatic* application of combat techniques as well as training”.⁷⁸ In addition, *wuxia* appeared earlier than kung fu, the former being “the earliest type of martial arts cinema” and the latter, a more recent genre initially developing in Hong Kong.⁷⁹ The *wuxia* genre, as emphasised by Teo, is close in style to swordplay films. Defining the *wuxia* genre by differentiating it from kung fu was widely accepted in Hong Kong, especially before the boom of modern action movies that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, most of which involve gun fights and car crashes. In the surveys of Hong Kong International Film Festivals in the early 1980s, *wuxia* and kung fu films are clearly divided, with each genre being dealt with in an independent survey.⁸⁰

Unlike the typical Hong Kong way of defining the *wuxia* genre by distinguishing it from the kung fu genre, the definition of *wuxia* in Mainland China and Taiwan is always accompanied by comparisons with *wuda*, *xiayi*, *wushu* and so on. In other words, the criteria applied in Hong Kong are typically based on the different styles of

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 4-5.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁰ This fact has been introduced in many academic works. See, Leon Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Tiger* (London & New York: Wallflower, 2003), 4. Also see Mo Chen, *History of Chinese Wuxia Films* (中国武侠电影史) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 124-126. In his book, Chen Mo even lists the swordplay and kung fu films selected in the 1980 and 1981 Hong Kong International Film Festivals.

fighting, while the standard adopted in Mainland China and Taiwan depends mainly on whether the *xia* spirit is involved or not. It is not hard to understand such a difference. In Mainland China and Taiwan, *wu* is typically treated as the form or vehicle which carries the *xia* spirit, and this spirit is usually the core of a film. This echoes the concept that literature should serve politics, which derives from traditional Chinese culture and exerts a great influence on modern Chinese arts.⁸¹ The extreme example is the model operas which dominated the screen and stage of Mainland China during the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976). The dominant position of model operas had even prevented the invention of *wuxia* films in Mainland until the early 1980s. In Taiwan, the government's dominance in filmmaking had endured from the late 1940s to the 1980s; thus in Taiwan, serving politics was as important a task or concern of filmmakers as it was in Mainland China. Therefore, in *wuxia* films made in Mainland China and Taiwan, it seems that the spirit and ideological content of a *wuxia* film were more important than its form. However, in Hong Kong film, *wu* seems to have been more important than the *xia* spirit, and this element has been well developed along with the prosperity of martial arts cinema in Hong Kong. *Wu* has gradually evolved to be the core of Hong Kong's martial arts films, especially in those that have been made for purely commercial reasons. This being the case, fighting styles such as sword-wielding and fist-fighting have been developed into different cinematic genres.

⁸¹ Early in the Classical Prose Movement (古文运动) happened in the late Tang and Song dynasties, the content and goal of literature, rather than its language style or form, was stressed as the core of the writing. This movement aimed at promoting the use of concise and direct writing style to replace the parallel prose style. This proposition was later on promoted and refined by Zhou Dunyi (周敦颐) in the Song dynasty. He emphasises the social function of literature and stresses that literature should serve as a vehicle to carry the social value, which, in Zhou's argument, stands for the Confucian value (文以载道). The thought that literature and art should serve politics was stressed by Mao Zedong (毛泽东) in his speeches in the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942. These speeches were later on edited published as a book. See, Zedong Mao, *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* (在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1975).

The development of Hong Kong's martial arts films has profoundly influenced the same genre in Mainland China and Taiwan. Along with the gradually increasing cooperation among the three regions, the *wu* element in a *wuxia* film is becoming more complicated today. Even though, in the academic field, *wuxia* is in a narrow sense still equated with swordplay, the limitation of dividing *wuxia* and kung fu as two specific cinematic genres has long been recognised. For example, in a number of *wuxia* films, heroes also fight with bare hands. Besides, even Teo himself claims that heroes in kung fu films can also display the merits of chivalry and righteousness of the *xia* spirit; indeed, this is always the case.

Defining *wuxia* as a specific cinematic genre, which is different from kung fu, is not the only way to understand this concept. Leon Hunt has devoted a great deal of attention to study the kung fu genre. Despite this, he states in his work *Kung Fu Cult Masters*, that “different branches of Chinese martial arts cinema find their origin in the *wu xia pian* or ‘martial chivalry film’”.⁸² Besides, in Chen Mo's two monographs about Chinese *wuxia* films, the *wuxia* genre is explained in a broad sense as including all the films which depict typical Chinese chivalry according to the *xia* spirits and present typical Chinese martial arts skills or fighting styles, including both swordplay and kung fu.⁸³ This definition is made in Chen's thorough studies of Chinese *xia* images and spirits, and *wuxia* films in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China as a whole. In his works, *wu* involves swordplay, kung fu and other forms of Chinese martial arts; the *xia* spirit is not a fixed characteristic, but is changeable in different times. When Chen explains the meaning of *xia*, he particularly cites Liang Yusheng

⁸² Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters*, 6.

⁸³ See Chen, *History of Chinese wuxia films*, 2. Also see Mo Chen, *The Montage of Blade and Chivalry: The Research of the Chinese Wuxia Films* (刀光侠影蒙太奇: 中国武侠电影论) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 10-11.

(梁羽生, also named Chen Wentong, 陈文统, 1924 - 2009), a famous Chinese-language *wuxia* novelist, who claimed that the *xia* spirit is the spirit of the age. Liang even stresses that the *xia* spirit may be found in the fine qualities of people in the lower classes, and that *xia* characters should be brave to fight against reactionary rules.⁸⁴ Such an explanation of the *xia* spirit is in keeping with revolutionary politics issued by the Communist Party of China. Defining *xia* characteristics as changeable qualities that are closely related to the spirit of the age could help the understanding of the transformation of the connotations of *xia* from the Warring States period to the present period. Two thousand years ago, *xia* characters were regarded as living outside the law. However, at present, people who work for the government and uphold the law may also become *xia*. For instance, the constable character Zhan Zhao, who is given the name “imperial cat” by the emperor, is defined as a *xia* character in a series of novels and films.⁸⁵ Moreover, today’s *wuxia* novelist Wen Rui’an created the characters of four sergeants in his series of *wuxia* novels; and these sergeants’ stories have also been important subjects of *wuxia* films.⁸⁶ These film characters fight not only for justice and the weak, but also for the country and its laws. Likewise, in different times, *wu* has also had different manifestations. Kung fu, to a certain extent, is a form that evolves to meet the increasing market demand for action spectacle in Hong Kong’s commercial circumstance.

⁸⁴ Liang’s definition of *xia* is quoted from Chen, *The Montage of Blade and Chivalry*, 50-51.

⁸⁵ Zhan Zhao first appeared in a novel combining the *wuxia* genre with court-case fiction in the late Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912). This novel is called *The Three Heroes and Five Gallants* (三侠五义), which was edited according to the oral performance of the storyteller Shi Yukun (石玉昆). Later on, this novel was revised by Yu Yue (俞樾) and was given the name *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* (七侠五义). The character Zhan Zhao as a typical *xia* character exists in a great number of films and TV dramas among Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China. For instance, the 1967 *wuxia* film *King Cat* (七侠五义) produced by Shao Brothers Studio is one of them.

⁸⁶ For instance, *The Four* (2012), *The Four II* (2013) and *The Four III* (2014) are the popular film trilogy adapted from Wen Ri’an’s novel series of the four sergeants.

In this thesis, any film which combines *wu* action with *xia* spirit will be counted as a *wuxia* film. Defining *wuxia* in this broad sense is not simply more realistic, but also necessary because of the actual development of Hong Kong's *wuxia* films. In other words, it becomes increasingly hard to draw a clear boundary between swordplay and kung fu. One instance of this is a 2011 film *Dragon*, directed by Hong Kong director Peter Chan and starring Donnie Yen, one of Hong Kong's top action actors, who is famous for his kung fu performances. Although a considerable part of this film is devoted to Yen's fist-fighting, the Chinese name of this film is “武侠” (which is written as “wuxia” in Chinese pinyin), exactly the same two characters as that of the genre *wuxia*. Naming a film which is typified by kung fu style as “wuxia” indicates that the development of martial arts films has gradually necessitated defining the *wuxia* genre in a broad sense.

1.4.3 Chinese eunuchs

The third issue relates to the definition of Chinese eunuchs. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the explanations of the term eunuch as follows.

eunuch /'ju:nək/ *noun & verb*. OE.

[Latin *eunuchus* from Greek *eunoukhos* lit. ‘bedroom guard’, from *eunē* bed + forms of *ekhein* keep.]

► **A noun.** **1** A castrated man; such a man employed as a harem attendant or (*Hist.*) charged with important affairs of state in Mediterranean countries. OE. **2** *fig.* A person or thing with some kind of incapacity, specified or implied; an ineffectual person. L16 **3** = CASTRATO. M18 ► **B verb trans.** = EUNUCHIZE. Now *rare*. E17. ■ **eunuchism** *noun* the process or custom of

making eunuchs; the condition of being a eunuch; emasculation: E17. **eunuchize**

verb trans. castrate; reduce to the condition of a eunuch; emasculate (*lit. & fig.*):

M17. **eunuchry** *noun (rare)* the state of being a eunuch M19.⁸⁷

Broadly speaking, the English word eunuch has three meanings: a physically castrated man, a person who has certain incapacities (other than physical), and a thing with some deficiency. In the broad sense, the castrated man could be a court servant, a castrato or a man castrated for faith. In Gary Taylor's words, "All these roles of the eunuch—the harem guardian, the gifted singer, the trusted servant of emperors, the exemplary Christian—were familiar in humanist England."⁸⁸ Besides, the English word eunuch may also stand for men who have been castrated because of illness.

In a narrow sense, a eunuch should be a man who has been castrated physically, and the main reason to have eunuchs in antiquity is to serve the ruler's family members and to guard the bedroom from adulterous affairs between the ruler's wives and other men. Through the proximity to the ruler, eunuchs may rise to positions of power and command important state affairs. In most cases, a eunuch refers to a castrated man who is also a court servant. Mary M. Anderson describes these palace eunuchs as "palace menials, harem watchdogs, and spies for rulers in most of the ancient world – kingdoms stretching from Rome, Greece, and North Africa, through the biblical lands, and on across the Asian continent"⁸⁹.

⁸⁷ William R. Trumble, Angus Stevenson and Lesley Brown eds. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. 5th ed. Vol 1 · A—M. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 868.

⁸⁸ Gary Taylor, *Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 41.

⁸⁹ Mary M. Anderson, *Hidden Power: The Palace Eunuchs of Imperial China* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1990), 15.

In Chinese, the English term eunuch has a number of relevant translations which were created in ancient times, such as *shiren* (寺人), *yanren* (奄人), *furen* (腐人), *zhongguan* (中官), *diaodang* (貂珰), *neiguan* (内官), *xingren* (刑人), *huanguan* (宦官), *taijian* (太监) and etc.⁹⁰ Some of them are still widely used in modern times and the most popular ones are *huanguan* and *taijian*. However, among all these titles, the one which could literally render the meaning of the English term eunuch in the broad sense is not *huanguan* or *taijian*, but *yanren*, which could literally be translated as “a castrated man”.⁹¹ Nevertheless, in various Chinese contexts, *yanren* is generally used to describe the palace eunuch, rather than any man who has been castrated. Moreover, almost all the Chinese words which have been used to title a castrated man are typically applied to depict the palace eunuch.

The usage of these words suggests that the eunuch, in Chinese culture, mainly refers to the castrated man who is also employed as a court servant. Moreover, men castrated for the sake of becoming musicians or for religious reasons are rarely found in Chinese history. Even though cases of castration by one's own volition could be observed in Chinese history, almost all of the castrated aimed to become court eunuchs, rather than to have high achievement in other aspects especially in the Ming Dynasty. What cannot be denied is that there were castrated men who had not become royal servants. However, these men could scarcely have been titled as *huanguan* or

⁹⁰ Huaqing Yu, *Zhongguo huanguan zhidu shi* (中国宦官制度史, The History of the Political System of Eunuchs) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 8-10.

Dong Leng, *Bei yange de shouhu shen: huanguan yu zhongguo zhengzhi* (被阉割的守护神: 宦官与中国政治, The Castrated Patron: Eunuchs and Chinese Politics) (Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1990), 17-22.

Rong Gu and Jinfang Ge, *Wu Heng Wei Qiang—Gudai huanguan qunti de wenhua kaocha* (雾横帷墙—古代宦官群体的文化考察 *The Investigation of Ancient Eunuchs from A Cultural Aspect*) (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 7-15.

⁹¹ Zhufeng Luo, ed. *Han yu da ci dian* (Chinese Dictionary), Vol. 2. (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1988), 1530.

taijian in ancient China; only in a broad sense could they be called *yanren*. Therefore, in a strict sense, a eunuch in the Chinese context always refers to the castrated man who is also a royal servant.

1.4.4 Personal pronouns of eunuchs

The fourth issue concerns the personal pronouns used to refer to eunuchs. In this thesis, nominative/objective personal pronoun he/him and adjective/nominal possessive pronoun his/his will be applied to the eunuch figures. This thesis will neither define eunuchs as male nor determine them as female. The most important reason for applying the masculine way to refer to eunuchs is that this is a universally adopted manner in most academic works and non-academic prints.

1.4.5 Spelling style of Chinese names

Chinese names are spelt in Chinese style in this thesis. This means surname comes first and is followed by given name. Many Hong Kong people have their English given names which are always put before their surnames. In this thesis this norm is kept. Besides, Hong Kong names are printed according to their Cantonese spelling.

Chapter 2: *Yin-yang* Matrix and Chinese Eunuchs

As discussed in Chapter One, the connotations of masculine and feminine vary from place to place. If the concepts *yin* and *yang* could be viewed as the Chinese equivalent of masculine and feminine, the construction of eunuchs' military power in films might be interpreted as a way of feminising these characters. Such an interpretation obviously goes against the general understanding of military power in contemporary ideologies in both western and eastern societies. Such contradictions create an intriguing dilemma that is difficult to comprehend. Can the Chinese *yin-yang* duality be applied to this research? If it can, on what grounds can such a duality be used?

In order to answer the above questions, it is not only necessary to clarify the implications of the Chinese terms *yin* and *yang*, but also important to expound the differences and connections between these terms and the western concepts of masculine and feminine. The Chinese concepts *yin* and *yang* will not be detailed in every aspect in this thesis. Instead, the motivation of introducing them will be on their connotations, which can serve the exploration of the masculine and feminine models in a Chinese cultural context.

2.1 *Yin and Yang*

In the Oxford English Dictionary, *yin* is defined as “shade, feminine, the moon”, and “the female or negative principle of the two opposing forces of the universe”.¹

¹ William R. Trumble, Angus Stevenson and Lesley Brown eds. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. 5th ed. Vol 2 · N—Z. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3700.

Correspondingly, *yang* is explained as “sun, positive, male genitals”, “masculine”, and “the male or positive principle of the two opposing forces of the universe”.²

In the work *A History of Chinese Philosophy* written by Feng Youlan (冯友兰, 1895-1990), one of the most influential Chinese philosophers in the modern era, *yin* and *yang* are described as follows.

[Y]*ang* and *yin* are conceived of as two mutually complementary principles or forces, of which the *yang* represents masculinity, light, warmth, dryness, hardness, activity, etc., while the *yin* represents femininity, darkness, cold, moisture, softness, passivity, etc. All natural phenomena result from the ceaseless interplay of these two forces.³

Evidently, both western and eastern discourses adapt the notions of feminine and masculine to interpret *yin* and *yang*, or in other words, to grasp the concepts of *yin* and *yang*. Moreover, “[w]hen Euro-American writers first began to discuss the *yin-yang* metaphor, it was commonly treated as the conceptual equivalent of the Western conception of femininity and masculinity”.⁴ However, the comparability between the system of *yin* and *yang* and the system of feminine and masculine has increasingly been questioned. After all, they are generated from different cultural backgrounds and used in different ways. It is not hard to comprehend that the connotations of *yin* and *yang* differ from that of feminine and masculine towards the same object, because they decode the same phenomena from different angles.

² Ibid., 3691.

³ Yu-lan Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. II, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 7.

⁴ Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 48-49.

2.1.1 Different Origins: *Yin-yang* System ≠ Feminine-masculine System

As analysed in the last chapter, the meanings of masculine and feminine are derived from social expectations for men and women. However, no matter how the social environment changes, the implications of masculine and feminine are always closely associated with and based on the understanding of the sex and gender division. Interestingly, rather than originating from the understanding of the division between men and women, the notions of *yin* and *yang* are usually believed to be rooted in Chinese ancestors' observation of nature. Alison Black stresses that, although Chinese cosmology closely interacts with the general comprehension of gender difference, such comprehension is by no means the decisive factor for the formation of *yin* and *yang*—the core forces of Chinese cosmology.⁵

Originally, the *yin* and *yang* symbols were marked as the broken line (*yin yao*, 阴爻) and the solid line (*yang yao*, 阳爻) respectively. They were first intimated in the figures in the Eight Trigrams of Fuxi (Fuxi bagua, 伏羲八卦), which is the predecessor of the Eight Trigrams of King Wen (King Wen bagua 文王八卦), also named *Zhou Yi* (《周易》), written in the early ninth century BCE).⁶ In the 1920s, by investigating these lines and hexagrams, famous scholars such as Qian Xuantong (钱玄同, 1887-1939), Zhou Yutong (周予同, 1898-1981) and Guo Moruo (郭沫若, 1892-1978) pointed out that these hexagrams were closely correlated to Chinese ancestors' worship of reproduction, where the broken line symbolised the female

⁵ Alison Harley Black, "Gender and Cosmology in Chinese Correlative Thinking", *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, Ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 166.

⁶ Jeaneane D. Fowler and Merv Fowler, *Chinese Religions: Beliefs and Practices* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 41-42.

sexual organ while the solid line symbolised that of the male.⁷ Apparently, such a statement indicates that *yin* and *yang* originated from traditional reproductive concepts about men and women. However, Zhao Guohua (赵国华, 1943-1991), in his work *Studies of the Worship of Reproduction*, first published in 1990, stresses that these scholars' opinions are largely based on imagination rather than on cogent argument.⁸ By carefully examining the Eight Trigrams of Fuxi, Zhao further confirms the relationship between the hexagrams and ancestors' worship of reproduction. However, instead of emphasising the sex or gender division between male and female, Zhao illustrates the worship of reproduction by noting the evolution of the images of fish and birds painted in unearthed antiquities.⁹ Referring to Zhao, such evolution exhibits the embryonic forms of the Eight Trigrams of Fuxi. Therefore, it is rational to interpret Zhao's finding as a positive manifestation of the relationship between the concepts *yin* and *yang* and the observation of nature.

In the works compiled during the periods of Western Zhou (1046 - 771 BC), and Spring and Autumn (770 - 476 BC), *yin* and *yang* are typically deemed to be two vital energies or two living forces which are named *qi* (气) in Chinese. For instance, in the work *Zuo Zhuan* (《左传》), *yin* and *yang* are classified among six *qi* which also involve wind, rain, darkness and light.¹⁰ In the earliest chapter "Discourses of Zhou"

⁷ Guohua Zhao, *Studies of the Worship of Reproduction* (生殖崇拜文化论) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996), 1.

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Ibid., 167-180 & 255-282.

¹⁰ Bojun Yang ed., *Commentary on the Spring and Autumn and Zuo Annal* (春秋左传注) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 1222.
Chinese original: 《左传·昭公元年》：“天有六气，……六气曰阴、阳、风、雨、晦、明也。”
English translation: *Zuo Zhuan*, The First Year of Duke Zhao: “Heaven has six *qi*. ... The six *qi* are *yin*, *yang*, wind, rain, dark and light.” Translation quoted from Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 146.

of the work *Discourses of the States* (《国语》), *yin* and *yang* as two natural vital energies are further associated with the development of human society.

The *qi* of heaven and earth can't lose its order. If its order vanishes people will be disoriented. *Yang* was stuck and could not get out, *yin* was suppressed and could not evaporate, so an earthquake was inevitable. Now the earthquakes around the three rivers are due to *yang* losing its place and *yin* being pressed down. *Yang* is forsaken under *yin* so the source of rivers has been blocked. If the foundation of rivers is blocked the country will definitely collapse.¹¹

It is possible to argue that it was in the late Spring and Autumn period, when the work *Yi Jing* (《易经》) was compiled, that *yin* and *yang* first displayed a clear relevance to the sex division. The terms *qian* (乾) and *kun* (坤), which respectively represent the pure *yang* and pure *yin* positions in Chinese hexagrams, are annotated as *yang wu* (阳物) and *yin wu* (阴物) in *Yi Jing*, which is generally accepted as a work compiled by Confucius (孔子, 551-479 BC) in order to further explain *Zhou Yi*.¹² More than one contemporary scholar has interpreted the words *yang wu* and *yin wu* as the male's penis and the female's vulva; however, such an understanding has already been criticised as groundless by Nan Huai-Chin (南怀瑾, 1918-2012). He points out that male's penis was first referred to be *yang wu* during the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907)

¹¹ Qiuming Zuo, *Discourses of the States*, Vol. 1. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 26 – 27. Chinese original: 《国语·周语上》：“夫天地之气，不失其序，若过其序，民乱之也。阳伏而不能出，阴迫而不能烝，于是有地震。今三川震，是阳失其所而填阴也；阳溢而壮，阴源必塞，国必亡。” Translation cited here is quoted from *Internet Encyclopedia of philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, accessed 1 May. 2016. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/yinyang/>

¹² The terms *yang wu* (阳物) and *yin wu* (阴物) are founded in *Xi ci* (系辞), which is also called Commentary on the Appended Phrases or Great Treatise. Confucius and his students are usually believed to be the authors. This text is a commentary on *Zhou Yi*. See, Shouqi Huang and Shanwen Zhang ed, *Zhou Yi Zhu Shi* (周易译注, *Translation and Annotation of Zhou Yi*) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2010), 589.

and the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279), and before this period, it had been named *shi* (勢).¹³ Therefore, *yin* and *yang* in *Yi Jing* should not be simply interpreted as a manifestation of the female and male sexual organs.

2.1.2 Complementary vs Opposing

Following the above argument, the concepts *yin* and *yang* are derived from the observation of nature, rather than typically from the sex division between male and female. Apart from the different original sources, the concepts *yin* and *yang* may differ from the notions feminine and masculine in respect of interrelationship. To put it briefly, masculine and feminine are generated as two opposing polarities, while *yin* and *yang* are raised in a complementary pattern. Such a difference could be revealed from the different ways in which the images of human ancestors were recorded.

By citing the *Image of Fuxi and Nüwa from Xinjiang Turfan Tang Dynasty tomb*, Robin W. Wang points out that Fuxi and Nüwa, who have long been imagined as the ancestors of Chinese people, “are not two separate and independent entities but one unitary body that consists of two necessary and interrelated parts: male and female.”¹⁴ (See Figure 1) This is to say, referring to Wang, “for the Chinese, if there is no woman, then the man will not be a perfect circle. The circle forms only through man and woman together.”¹⁵ The relation for Chinese male and female ancestors clearly displays a complementary *yin-yang* cosmology. Obviously, the relationship between Chinese male and female ancestors is different from that of the archetypical western ancestors, since the first woman Eve is believed to have been made of a rib of the first

¹³ Huai-Chin Nan, *Yi Jing Za Shuo* (易经杂说, *Comments on the Book of Changes*) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 119-121.

¹⁴ Robin R. Wang, *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 103.

¹⁵ Ibid.

man Adam. This implies that the man himself is already a perfect entity. Moreover, in most works of art or literature, Adam and Eve are portrayed as two independent entities. (See Figure 2) Furthermore, it is not hard to comprehend that in typical western culture, “the prototype of all opposition or contrariety is the contrariety of sex.”¹⁶

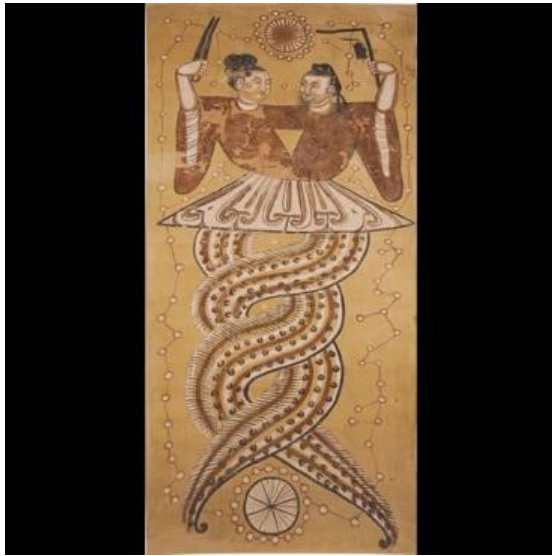


Figure 1



Figure 2

It has long been criticised as a partial or superficial view to mark *yin* and *yang* as simply a pair of mutually exclusive opposites. For instance, Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, who has devoted great efforts to the study of feminism in Chinese philosophical framework, especially in the system of Confucian doctrines, asserts that “unlike the dualistic paradigm of the feminine and the masculine in the West, *yin-yang* as a non-oppositional, complementary binary cannot function as an adequate theoretical justification for gender oppression in China”.¹⁷ Unlike Rosenlee, Robin R. Wang does not exclude the oppositional relationship between *yin* and *yang*; rather, she treats the

¹⁶ Francis Cornford Macdonald, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (London: E. Arnold, 1912), 65.

¹⁷ Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 48.

opposing pattern as one dimension of *yin* and *yang*'s multiple dynamics. She interprets *yin* and *yang* as “neither dualistic in positing two absolutely independent entities nor even simply dialectical in projecting one single pattern for change”.¹⁸ She further points out that “[Y]in and *yang* contest each other in a temporal framework and in multiple ways”, and generalises these multiple relations into six forms.¹⁹ In Wang's words, these forms are *maodun* (矛盾, contradiction and opposition), *xiangyi* (相依, interdependence), *huan* (互含, mutual inclusion), *jiaogan* (交感, interaction or resonance), *hubu* (互补, complementary or mutual support) and *zhuanghua* (转化, change and transformation).²⁰ Moreover, by citing the understanding of *yin* and *yang*, Wang points out that the basic difference between Chinese thought and Western thought is that “the Chinese focuses on interconnection, immanence, and cyclical changes, while Western philosophers emphasize dualism, transcendence, and eternal principles”.²¹

2.1.3 Common Ground Between the Yin-yang and Feminine-masculine Systems

The concepts *yin* and *yang*, which are different from the notions feminine and masculine, are shaped from ancient observation and understanding of nature, the cosmos, and everything in the universe, rather than derived from the typical social expectations for men and women. In the *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, related records are as follows:

The earliest Chinese characters for *yin* and *yang* are found in inscriptions made on “oracle bones” (skeletal remains of various animals used in ancient Chinese

¹⁸ Robin R. Wang, “Understanding of Yin Yang”, *Religion Compass* 7.6 (2013), 216.

¹⁹ Ibid., 216.

²⁰ Ibid., 216-219

²¹ Ibid., 215.

divination practices at least as early as the 14th century B.C.E.). In these inscriptions, *yin* and *yang* simply are descriptions of natural phenomena such as weather conditions, especially the movement of the sun.²²

In Confucius' words, the way Fuxi invented the hexagrams is as follows:

Anciently, when Pao-his had come to the rule of all under heaven, looking up, he contemplated the brilliant forms exhibited in the sky, and looking down he surveyed the patterns shown on the earth. He contemplated the ornamental appearances of birds and beasts and the (different) suitabilities of the soil. Near at hand, in his own person, he found things for consideration, and the same at a distance, in things in general. On this he devised the eight trigrams, to show fully the attributes of the spirit-like and intelligent (operations working secretly), and to classify the qualities of the myriads of things.²³

Unlike the concepts masculine and feminine, *yin* and *yang* were not derived particularly from the concern about the sex division; however, these two systems still have common ground in their origins. In other words, since the Chinese ancestors had noticed the obvious difference between day and night, they surely did not have missed out the different sexual traits of various species. Biological difference invariably exists as part of nature, and awareness of the sexual difference should also be included in the observation of nature. To this extent, the system of *yin* and *yang* and the system of feminine and masculine are not contrary to each other.

²² James Fieser, "Yinyang (Yin-yang)", *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, accessed 1 May. 2016. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/yinyang/>

²³ Zhongtao Shen trans, *The Text of Yi King (and Its Appendixes): Chinese Original with English Translation* (中英对照易经) (Taipei: Wenhua tushu gongsi, 1983), 309.
Chinese Original: 《易·系词下》：“古者包羲氏之王天下也，仰则观象于天，俯则观法于地，观鸟兽之文，与地之宜。近取诸身。远取诸物，于是使作八卦，以通神明之德，以类万物之情。”Translation is quoted from Shen, *The Text of Yi King*, "The Great Appendix. Section II", 309.

Concerning the relationship between the *yin-yang* system and gender difference, Lisa Raphals investigates the correlation between *yin-yang* and *nan-nü* (which literally means men-women) and gives her arguments as follows:

1. Before the third century [BC], *yin-yang* polarities are mostly cyclic and relatively nonhierarchical. Overall, *yin* and *yang* are not used in analogy with either heaven-earth or gender-based polarities. 2. When *yin* and *yang* first assumed the role of the basic polarity (and entered philosophic discourse) in the third and second centuries [BC], *yin-yang* was still not used in strong analogy with either *nan-nü* or *tian-di* and in some cases, *yin-yang nan-nü* analogies were criticized as being incorrect. ... 3. It is in the first century (B.C.E.), especially with the cosmology building of the *Chunqiu fanlu*, that *yin-yang nan-nü* language became a common aspect of *yin-yang* language as part of the gender hierarchy embedded in Han correlative cosmology. ... 4. While gender hierarchy was part of the second and first century [BC] medical discourse of the *Fifty-two Ailments* and *Huang Di neijing*, these medical works present an implicit tension between two divergent views of women. In one view, female *yin* stands in polarity with male *yang*. ...²⁴

The evolution of *yin* and *yang* as revealed by Raphals, displays on the one hand, the difference between *yin-yang* system and the system of masculine and feminine; on the other hand, it indicates that since the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 226 AD), common ground between these two systems has appeared.

²⁴ Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 142.

From two aspects, these two systems share common grounds. The first aspect occurs when *yin* and *yang* are viewed as hierarchical characteristics constructed on social expectations. It is from the later stage of the Warring States period (475 – 221 BC) and especially in the Han Dynasty that *yin* and *yang* started to be viewed as dualistic polarities and were applied to rationalise social order and hierarchical analogies. The typical work that reveals this fact is *Chunqiu fanlu* (《春秋繁露》) composed by Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒, 179-104 BC). Dong blends the popular philosophies of various schools of thought, all of which developed before the Han, into his theory and plays a crucial role in promoting Confucianism as the dominant official ideology. Dong systematically raises the doctrine of the three cardinal guides and five constant virtues for feudal society. The three cardinal guides depict the hierarchical priority of the ruler, father and husband over the subject, son and wife.²⁵ According to Dong, these rules are strictly founded on the order of *yin* and *yang*, which exemplify the order of heaven.²⁶ Specifically, ruler, father and husband are *yang*, while subject, son and wife are *yin*. In Dong's thought, *yin* and *yang* are

²⁵ Zhenyu Zeng and Yongju Fu annotate, *Chunqiu Fanlu with New Annotations* (春秋繁露新注) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2010), 309.

Chinese original: 《春秋繁露》：“天子受命于天，诸侯受命于天子，子受命于父，臣妾受命于君，妻受命于夫。”

English translation: *Chunqiu Fanlu/ Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*: “The emperor should comply with the way of heaven; dukes should practise the requests of the emperor; sons should obey fathers; concubines should be guided by the king; and wives should be in obedience to husbands.” Translation mine.

²⁶ Ibid., 260.

Chinese original: 《春秋繁露》：“君为阳，臣为阴；父为阳，子为阴；夫为阳，妻为阴。”

English translation: *Chunqiu Fanlu/ Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*: “The ruler, father and husband meet the quality of *yang*, while the subject, son and wife meet the quality of *yin*.” Translation mine.

Also see Zeng, *Chunqiu Fanlu with New Annotations*, 244.

Chinese original: 《春秋繁露》：“阳贵而阴贱，天之制也。”

English translation: *Chunqiu Fanlu/ Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*: “*Yang* is superior to *yin*. This is the law of heaven.” Translation mine.

opposite forces, and *yang* is superior to *yin*.²⁷ This understanding of *yin* and *yang* has governed Chinese culture for thousands of years and still deeply influences today's construction of gender in China. In general, the fact that "women were more or less socially subordinated to men throughout Chinese history" cannot be separated from the hierarchical order imposed on *yin* and *yang*.²⁸

It was not Dong's innovation to associate *yang* with social roles such as ruler, master, father and husband, and *yin* with subject, servant, son and wife. Likewise, not simply in the Confucian school, *yang* is linked to characteristics such as active, dominant and dynamic, and *yin* to passive, subordinate and static. Nevertheless, it is typical in Dong's theory that the nature of *yin* and nature of *yang* are set up as opposing polarities and used to rationalise social rules. From complementary forces to opposing polarities, the evolution of *yin* and *yang* in Confucian theory reveals that these two notions have shifted from being determined by the observation of nature to being defined by social requirements. In other words, although *yin* and *yang* were primary-scientific terminologies, once they were "borrowed" by Confucianism – a social science school – they were "refurbished" and became terms to describe a hierarchical system. It was social expectations that gave *yin* and *yang* their hierarchical importance, rather than the observation of nature or cosmos.

Yin and *yang* can therefore be viewed as constructed according to social expectations. In Hong Kong's *wuxia* films, eunuchs' political status was always composed in relation to other roles, such as emperor, concubine, and prisoners as well

²⁷ Michael Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a "Confucian" heritage and the Chun qiu fan lu*, vol. 20, (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2011), 244. Loewe writes in his work that, "[w]hile Yin serves to assist Yang, Yang leads the growth of living matter; the sequence of Three Kings follows Yang as do the distinctions of honour, with rulers and fathers fit to face Yang, servants and sons fit to face Yin. It is part of heaven's system to accord priority to Yang over Yin".

²⁸ Wang, *Yinyang*, 104.

as eunuchs' subordinates. In different films, their stories are presented in different networks of social relationships. Using the concepts *yin* and *yang* to study the social roles of eunuchs may reveal the social expectations for their power in different periods.

The second aspect that bridges *yin-yang* matrix with masculine/feminine mechanism emerges when *yin* and *yang* are identified as two different logic systems. Applying the *yin-yang* matrix as organised in Dong's theory, to the investigation of eunuchs' social and political roles constructed in films can only partly analyse their masculinity and femininity. Apart from being prescribed as political or social entities, eunuchs have other features. For instance, they are depicted as having different pursuits, values or personalities in different times. If Confucian thought could be used to illustrate their pursuit of outstanding political or social achievements, Taoist thought may be adopted to demonstrate their desire to go back to a natural and normal life. To a great extent, in typical Confucian thought, one's value is determined more by social value than by personal worth; while in the Taoist perception, the core idea lies in behaving in a purely natural way without the struggle for dominance, force and control.²⁹

The difference between Confucian thought and Taoist thought, both of which are classical philosophical doctrines widely applied in state governance and self-cultivation, is typically based on their different evaluations of the binary nature of *yin* and *yang*. Specifically, both Confucianism and Taoism associate the nature of *yang* with dominance and power, and link *yin* to submissiveness and yielding. However,

²⁹ Guying Chen annotates and trans, *Huangdi sijing jinzhu jinyi* (黄帝四经今注今译, *The Huangdi Sijing with modern annotations and translations*), (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007), 2.

Confucian thought highlights the nature of *yang*, while Taoist thought values the nature of *yin*.

Furthermore, “[t]he Taoist tradition, where the receptive *yin* qualities in nature are emphasized, was often characterized as being feminine, and the Confucian tradition that emphasizes the need of a well-ordered human society, in contrast, was said to be masculine in orientation.”³⁰ Evidently, the wordings “receptive” and “well-ordered” reveal that, the system in which *yang* is emphasised is characterised by motifs of order, rule, law and regulation, settled by human society, and while that in which *yin* is valued is marked by receptive qualities and tolerant features learnt from nature. In this case, it is not surprising that it is in Confucian thought, rather than in Taoist thought, that *yin* and *yang* have evolved into a dualistic pattern. Furthermore, it is reasonable to deduce that a model that highlights *yang* signifies a dualistic logic, while a model that stresses *yin* emblematises a pluralistic logic.

Like the concepts of masculine and feminine, the notions of *yin* and *yang* could be decoded in various ways and be applied in countless contexts. For the purpose of studying cultural transformation, *yin-yang* matrices with different evaluations for *yin* and *yang* will be viewed as different logics characterised by either a pluralistic model or a dualistic model. Besides, *yin* and *yang* will also be read in terms of a hierarchical order, so as to examine the social expectations of the power structure in different periods.

Although the perceptions of *yin* and *yang* have fundamentally influenced all schools of thought arising during the Eastern Zhou period (770 -256 BC), such as Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, Mohism, the School of Yin-yang, the Logicians

³⁰ Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 49.

and so on, the connotations of these two terms will here mainly be subject to Confucian and Taoist thoughts. As the most influential schools of thought, Confucianism and Taoism crucially influenced the development of the concepts *yin* and *yang* during Chinese history. Although Taoism, unlike Confucianism, has rarely been supported by governments as an orthodox philosophy, its imperceptible impact on Chinese culture is everywhere. It is no exaggeration to say that during every prosperous period when Chinese culture flourished, Taoist thought always exerted a significant influence. In fact, the prosperity usually was the result of or affected by Taoist official policies. Even Neo-Confucianism, which flourished in the Song Dynasty and the Ming Dynasty (1368 -1662), was not merely developed from Confucian thought, but also markedly incorporated Taoist thought and the wisdom of Buddhism.

2.2 Chinese Eunuch and Their Roles in the *Yin-yang* Matrix

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a eunuch in a Chinese context always refers to a royal servant who is also a castrated man. His gender is hard to define. This is not only because of eunuchs' ambiguous biological identification, but also due to the fact that "the conceptional binaries of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual, which are central to the Western gender discourses and its signifying system as a whole, were largely absent in pre-modern China".³¹

In a similar vein, Rosenlee points out that "[i]n the Chinese world, a woman is a 'woman' only because she is also a daughter, a wife, and a mother. There are no

³¹ Geng Song, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 1.

distinct qualities of ‘woman’ as such”.³² Correspondingly, a man, in the Chinese context, should be a son, a husband and a father. Endorsing the view of Song Geng, an expert in studying masculinity in ancient China, the gender discourse in pre-modern China was not “sex-based” but rather power-based.³³ “[R]eciprocal social roles and obligations” form the Chinese gender system.³⁴ In this system, men were not always superior to women. If the concepts *yin* and *yang* are applied to the structure of the Chinese gender discourse, what becomes evident is that *yin* is not restricted to the female while *yang* is not invariably associated with the male. For instance, an empress or an emperor’s concubine should be *yang* while male officials should be *yin*; even in a common family, the hostess will possess a *yang* position in comparison with male servants’ *yin* status. This is because the empress, the concubine and the hostess are all hierarchically superior to their male subordinates.

Prior to the analysis of the eunuch images in Hong Kong’s *wuxia* films in the next chapter, this section will briefly introduce the Chinese eunuchs’ political status, and then investigate the eunuchs’ gendered role in the *yin-yang* matrix, rather than their characters in all aspects. This is because most eunuch characters depicted in contemporary films are taken from Chinese history. An investigation of their gendered roles in history may help to better understand their filmic masculinities and femininities, which are indeed the foci of this study.

³² Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 47.

³³ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, 15

³⁴ Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 46.

2.2.1 The Eunuchs' Political Role in Ancient China

Records of the earliest Chinese eunuchs appeared in the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600 BC—c. 1046 BC).³⁵ In the following Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046—256 BC), the Chinese eunuch system was initially instituted.³⁶ In the Qin (221—206 BC) and Han (206 BC—220 AD) dynasties, the eunuch system gradually became well developed.³⁷ It lasted thousands of years from the Zhou Dynasty to the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644—1912), without interruption.

In most cases, studies of Chinese eunuchs rarely avoided two issues: why eunuchs were endowed with high political power, and why the eunuch system in Chinese history could last for several centuries. These facts characterise Chinese eunuchs and make them distinct research objects in the study of monarchism as well as other historical matters. This thesis will revisit these topics as well.

Despite scholars' attempts to erode the power of eunuchs, the eunuchs continued to weather the political storms. Ancient scholars continually warned their emperors that eunuchs should not be allowed to intervene in politics. Even the Grand Historian Sima Qian (太史公司马迁, c. 145 or 135—86 BC), who was also a castrated man, suggested that eunuchs should not be permitted to take charge of state affairs.³⁸ Nevertheless, emperors in different dynasties still chose to empower eunuchs. The Eastern Han (25-220), Tang and Ming were the three most noteworthy dynasties in

³⁵ Mary M. Anderson, *Hidden Power: The Palace Eunuchs of Imperial China* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1990), 21-25.

³⁶ Lianda Xu and Ziyang Zhu, *Zhongguo huangdi zhidu* (中国皇帝制度, *Chinese Monarchy System*) (Guangzhou: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 396.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Rong Gu and Jinfang Ge, *Wu Heng Wei Qiang—Gudai huanguan qunti de wenhua kaocha* (*The Investigation of Ancient Eunuchs from A Cultural Aspect*) (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 124.

regard to eunuchs' power, which had increased to an unmanageable level. Why would emperors allow eunuchs to become such a powerful political force?

It is unreasonable to imagine that emperors would empower eunuchs with high political status without justification. From the political perspective, most Chinese scholars currently have reached a consensus that the institution of the eunuch system in ancient times was in the service of an autocratic monarchy system, and eunuchs' power was derived from the imperial power.³⁹ In other words, without the support of emperors, it would scarcely have been possible for eunuchs to gain a foothold on the political stage. Therefore, the purpose of authorising eunuchs to manage political affairs was presumably to consolidate the imperial power.

As mentioned above, the eunuchs' power had three times reached an uncontrollable level during the Eastern Han, Tang and Ming dynasties respectively. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, the emperors' authority had long been threatened by the kin of their consorts. In order to get rid of such a threat, these emperors had to foster another political force which was under their direct control and straightforwardly swore allegiance to them.⁴⁰ In this case, the emperors' close companions – the eunuchs, who were believed to have few external connections relating to marital attachment or parental relationships – became the ideal candidates.⁴¹ Although eunuchs were ultimately found to be another terrible menace to the emperors, emperors who wanted to secure their thrones in such circumstances had no choice but

³⁹ Xu, *Zhongguo huangdi zhidu* 435.

⁴⁰ Gu, *Wu Heng Wei Qiang*, 83-120.

⁴¹ Gu Ban, *Complete Modern translation of Twenty-Four Histories: Book of Han* (二十四史全译: 汉书), Vol. 3, ed. Jialu Xu (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 2004), 1848.

Chinese original: 《汉书·佞幸传·石显》: “中人无外党, 精专可信任。”

English translation: *Book of Han*, “Flatterers, Shi Xian”: “Eunuchs are trustworthy and dependable, because they have few external connections relating to marital attachment or parental relationships.” Translation mine.

to invest eunuchs with great political power, so as to balance the power of the clans of their consorts.

In the Tang Dynasty, eunuchs' interference in politics was manifested in the wielding of military power. Due to the *fanzhen* system that was institutionalised in the mid-late period of the Tang Dynasty, the real power over the armies in different places was in the hands of the regional governors rather than the emperors.⁴² In this instance, a number of eunuchs were empowered to supervise the armies on behalf of the emperors so as to regain the military power for them. It seems eunuchs had successfully seized such power by winning the rulers' confidence. However, the main reason for delegating military power to eunuchs still lay in the requirement to strengthen the rulers' reign.

Unlike the Han and Tang, the imperial authority in the Ming Dynasty was encroached on by neither the clan of consorts nor *fanzhen*. On the contrary, after the first Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋, 1328—1398) reformed the administrative system by abolishing the chancellor system, the emperor gained a centralised power. At the same time, the grand secretariat was initiated to aid the emperor. At that stage, the duty of the grand secretariat was still restricted to drawing up imperial decrees; officers in this department were not allowed to make decisions for the emperors. However, subsequent emperors' dependence on the cabinet increased quickly and steadily, and they promoted the grand secretariat to cabinet level. The cabinet gradually grew to be very important in helping the emperors reach decisions about various state affairs. Over time, the grand secretariat played an

⁴² *Fanzhen* system was a governmental system settled in the mid-late Tang Dynasty with the purpose of protecting Tang's territory from alien invasions. In the border area as well as other strategic locations, the central government would send troops which were then directly controlled by regional governors who were also called *jiedushi* (节度使).

increasingly important role in assisting the emperors. At the same time, it also formed a force that brought restrictions or even threats to imperial power. This being the case, the eunuchs' political role was once again noticed by the emperors, who then broke the convention and allowed the eunuchs to become literate. Eunuchs were given the power to approve or disapprove the cabinet's draft resolutions regarding state affairs. By authorising eunuchs, emperors obtained those personal assistants who were more contented with accepting orders, as a counterweight to the cabinet members. Eunuchs' political importance in the Ming Dynasty clearly reveals that, historically, the eunuchs' power was an extension of the emperors' power. In addition, the fate of most leading eunuchs in this dynasty clearly conveys a fact that they were political victims rather than beneficiaries of the monarchy.⁴³ In other words, in the Ming Dynasty, even though eunuchs had the opportunity to execute the judicial power on behalf of the emperors, they might lose this power easily and completely as soon as they were no longer trusted by their rulers.

Thus, it becomes easier to understand that although eunuchs' power had many times threatened or even ended several imperial dynasties, the monarchy in Chinese history was not affected but rather consolidated by the institution of the eunuch system. Eunuchs in these dynasties were trained to be agents of imperial authority in order to counterbalance other political forces which might threaten the imperial power. As Keith Hopkins puts it, "the political power of eunuchs in general, far from being a sign of the emperor's weakness, was ... a token of, and a factor in, the survival of the emperor as an effective ruler."⁴⁴

⁴³ Taisuke Mitamura, *Chinese Eunuchs: The Structure of Intimate Politics*, trans. Charles A. Pomeroy (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1970), 126.

⁴⁴ Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves: Sociological Studies in Roman History*, Vol. 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 196.

2.2.2 Eunuchs' Gendered Roles in Chinese Culture

This sub-section will combine a concern with eunuchs' political roles with an investigation of Chinese eunuchs' gendered roles in history. As previously stated, in a Chinese context, especially the traditional situation, one's gender role is closely associated with one's political status and social achievement, rather than biological traits. On the one hand, this implies that while eunuchs in a high position may be defined as *yang* in gender, those in a low position are *yin*. On the other hand, this indicates that a eunuch's gender role may vary from place to place; a powerful eunuch could be defined as *yang* in the relationship between himself and others who are lower in political rank, while he also shows the nature of *yin* in comparison with the emperor. In other words, a eunuch's gender role is not fixed, but influenced by the power structure he is in. Besides, the following analysis will show that from different standpoints, a eunuch's gender role may be depicted differently. For instance, even though most ancient scholars had not reached as high a political status as some eunuchs could seize, they still inclined to define eunuchs' gender character as *yin*. The following account will reveal that such an understanding is dependent on the Chinese scholars' political standpoint and their Confucian values and ideology.

Although eunuchs' political significance had brought them a masculine status, in the cultural area, they were still feminised in every way. The main reason for this may lie in the fact that Chinese history of eunuchs was compiled by scholars, especially by Confucian scholars who could hardly approve of eunuchs' methods of attaining political power. To be specific, the eunuchs' existence indicated a potential threat to the scholars' authority. In the introduction of his work *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, Shih-Shan Henry Tsai cites the stories of the scholar Yang Lian (杨涟,

1572-1625) and the eunuch Wei Zhongxian (魏忠贤, 1568-1627), and vividly depicts the different ways in which scholars and eunuchs could attain political success.⁴⁵ Tsai stresses that most ancient scholars could acquire political status only through assiduous study and strict examinations, while eunuchs might gain a similar position at the expense of their manhood, or become even more politically powerful through their intimacy with the emperors. In other words, the existence of eunuchs always signalled a different way or a short cut to seize political status, which was very difficult to attain by the scholars' arduous path. Therefore, it was predictable that scholars could scarcely approve of eunuchs' political importance.

Moreover, most emperors in ancient China espoused Confucian doctrine. As a consequence, most scholars mainly learnt Confucian classics and practised Confucian thoughts in their social lives. According to Confucianism, the body of a human being should be carefully protected from any kind of mutilation, as this would imply unfilial conduct and a failure to honour parents' painstaking care. Obviously, eunuchs' physical state of being castrated transgressed the conventional ethics of Chinese culture.⁴⁶ Therefore, it is common to find eunuchs being negatively characterised in most ancient as well as modern works. However, blaming eunuchs for their failure to protect their bodies is not logically compelling. This is because many eunuchs were sent by their parents for castration when they were children. Indeed, they were the obedient children. Therefore, it could be a misreading to describe eunuchs in general as ungrateful and lacking in conscience. As Hopkins notes, "we should have suspected, that these characteristics (ambition, emotional instability, arrogance and avarice) were the product of a position within the structure of power,...rather than a

⁴⁵ Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 1-6.

⁴⁶ Gu, *Wu Heng Wei Qiang*, 122.

direct consequence of castration.”⁴⁷ It is reasonable to assume that most characterisations of eunuchs that appeared in historical records were the products of a certain power structure which was typically characterised by the Confucian lexicon.

Besides, the negative comments from these scholars display a conspicuous paradox. That is, even though scholars in ancient China treated the existence of eunuchs as an offensive political threat and as unethical, most criticisms of eunuchs were made simply against eunuchs' evil conduct, rather than against the eunuch system as an institution. This might be because the institution of the eunuch system, rather than the existence of eunuchs per se, was in accordance with Confucian philosophy. The initial reason for having eunuchs rather than any other men employed as palace servants was to prevent illicit sexual relations in royal families so as to keep the purity of imperial descent. Such practices were in line with Confucian thought about restoring proper rites in human society. Furthermore, keeping the purity of the imperial bloodline could also help the consolidation of the emperor's absolute rule. Under this circumstance, scholars, who tried very hard to earn fame in a feudal society, had no reason to condemn the eunuch system or the existence of eunuchs. Therefore, although these scholars made almost nothing but negative remarks about eunuchs, there would seem to be no evidence that they recommended the abolition of the eunuch system.

In short, in the opinion of most ancient scholars, eunuchs should never overstep the line which marks eunuchs' primary social role as imperial servants. If for any reason eunuchs crossed over the line and become important in politics, they would be suspected of abusing power, or criticised for bringing disorder to the orthodox society.

⁴⁷ Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 173.

Regarding the political interference of eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty, Huang Zongxi (黄宗羲, 1610-1695) stresses that the main reason for his criticism was that the ruler confused the relationship between the inner and the outside, which symbolised the relative positions of eunuchs and scholar-officials.⁴⁸ It is evident that Huang, who, as a Neo-Confucian scholar, is noted for his criticism of monarchical autocracy, highlights the importance of social order, and believes that eunuchs should be restricted to the position of *yin*, compared with the *yang* position occupied by scholar-officials.

Chinese scholars applied a series of approaches to justify and emphasise the eunuchs' *yin* position. One conspicuous tactic, which can be found in the existing written works, is in the Chinese characters employed to refer to eunuchs. These frequently appearing titles directly reveal how eunuchs were conceived of by ancient scholars. As outlined in the previous chapter, a number of titles were used to name eunuchs in ancient China. Most of these titles had been created before the Ming Dynasty. *Yanren* (奄/阉人), *shiren* (寺/侍人), *zhongren* (中人) and *xingren* (刑人) are three examples. These titles did not signify eunuchs' political importance. Instead, they literally convey either a eunuch's physical condition as an emasculated man, or his prescribed role as an imperial servant. Both these categories are based on ancient scholars' understanding and expectation of eunuchs.

Within the characters, *yan* (奄) and *yan* (阉), which were interchangeable when they are employed to refer to eunuchs, there appeared a series of titles such as *yanren* (奄/阉人), *yanshu* (奄/阉竖), *yanshi* (奄/阉寺), *yanguan* (奄/阉官) and *yanhuan* (奄/

⁴⁸ Quoted by Martin W. Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Later Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 35.

阉宦). In a physical sense, the characters *yan* (奄) and *yan* (阉) implied the condition of losing male genital organs, which are termed as *yangshi* (阳施) in Chinese.⁴⁹ This being the case, when eunuchs were given the titles with the character *yan* (奄) or *yan* (阉), they were positioned in the opposite direction to normal men who have *yangshi*.

The character *shi* (寺) was another popular character adopted in a series of titles applied to eunuchs. In these titles, it had the same meaning as *shi* (侍), which referred to a servant.⁵⁰ Words combining with *shi* (寺) and used to signify eunuchs also included *huanshi* (宦寺), *yanshi* (阉寺), *diaoshi* (貂寺) and *fushi* (妇寺). With the *yin-yang* logic as a guide, eunuchs were characterised as *yin* in nature when these titles were applied to them, whereas their rulers would be in the position of *yang*. Such a pattern with the ruler being viewed as *yang* while the servant is being treated as *yin* had long governed the construction of Chinese culture. As explained before, the Confucian scholar Dong in the Han Dynasty highlights the *yin-yang* pattern between the ruler and the subject in the well-known Three Cardinal Guides.⁵¹

The characters *zhong* (中) and *nei* (内), which were largely used in eunuchs' titles, conveyed a similar distinction. Titles consisting of *zhong* and *nei* include *zhongren* (中人), *zhongchen* (中臣), *zhongshi* (中使), *zhonggui* (中贵), *zhongjuan* (中涓), *zhongdang* (中档), *neichen* (内臣), *neishi* (内侍), *neijian* (内监) and *neishi* (内使). *Zhong* and *nei* had different meanings in different contexts; however, both of

⁴⁹ Ye Fan, *Complete Modern translation of Twenty-Four Histories: Book of Later Han* (二十四史全译: 后汉书), Vol. 1. ed. Jialu Xu (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 2004), 352.
Chinese original: 《后汉书·五行志四》: “奄官无阳施, 犹妇人也。”
English translation: *Book of Later Han*, Five Elements Part Four: “Eunuchs can be treated as women, because they have lost their male genital organs.” Translation mine.

⁵⁰ Gu, *Wu Heng Wei Qiang*, 8.

⁵¹ See footnote 25.

them could be used to indicate an inner position. Considering that most eunuchs in ancient times were employed to work inside the palace, it becomes clear why they were frequently endowed with the characters *zhong* and *nei*. These titles also reveal ancient scholars' wish to define eunuchs by stressing their role as servants who should not take charge of state affairs, but could only take the responsibility of serving the royal family as a house slave.

The character *xing* (刑), which appeared in eunuchs' titles *xingren* (刑人) and *xingyu* (刑余), also exhibited the *yin* nature of eunuchs. Referring to *Cardinal Principles of Five Elements* (《五行大义》), *xing* represented *yin* while *de* (德) represented *yang*.⁵² In the ancient context, *xing* meant injuring, involving but not exclusively referring to the action of punishing, while *de* meant giving or rewarding.⁵³ *Xing* and *de* together implied two contrary yet also complementary ways of ideal governance. In antiquity, castrated prisoners of war or crime always provided an important source of palace eunuchs down through the history of ancient China, especially before the Tang Dynasty.⁵⁴ As a consequence, eunuchs as a collective were unavoidably stamped with the symbol of *xing* and the relevant titles obviously

⁵² Ji Xiao, *Wuxing Dayi* (五行大义, *Cardinal Principles of Five Elements*), annotates Tong Zheng (Beijing: Hualing chubanshe, 2010), 36.
Chinese original: 《五行大义》卷第七论德：“德不孤立，对之以刑。德为阳以从干，刑为阴以从坤。亦如人之治政，刑德两施，德有庆赐爵赏，所以配阳，刑有杀罚削夺，所以配阴。”
English translation: *Cardinal Principles of Five Elements*, the seventh part, “Comments on De”:
“De and xing are paired ideas. De should be categorised as a quality of yang, while xing, a quality of yin. Ideal governance should have both de and xing approaches being applied, with the former being embodied in rewards and celebrations, and the latter being practised in punishments and penalties. That is why de signifies yang, and xing signifies yin.” Translation mine.

⁵³ The influential political philosopher Han Fei (c. 280 – 233 BC) defines the concepts *de* (德) and *xing* (刑) in his work *Han Fei Tzŭ*. Chinese original: 《韩非子·二柄》：“何为刑、德？曰：杀戮之谓刑，庆赏之谓德。” English translation: *Han Fei Tzŭ*, “The Two Handles”: “What are meant by chastisement and commendation? To inflict death or torture upon culprits, is called chastisement; to bestow encouragements or rewards on men of merit, is called commendation.” This translation is quoted from “The Two Handles”, *The Complete Works of Han Fei Tzŭ: A Classic of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 1, trans. W. K. Liao (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1959), 46.

⁵⁴ Mitamura, *Chinese Eunuchs*, 58-59.

displayed that they were culturally categorised as *yin*, compared with people who were governed by *de*.

In summary, eunuchs were, in most cases, perceived by ancient scholars as possessing the nature of *yin* according to Confucian thought. What has to be clarified here is that being perceived as *yin* does not mean being treated as women. “*Yin* was associated with dark, cold, female, night, the moon, the earth,”⁵⁵ *Yin* implies women, yet is not restricted to this gender dynamic. In Chinese culture, treating a man as a woman is always derogatory. Nevertheless, endowing someone or something with the nature of *yin* does not necessarily involve a deprecatory sense, even though in Confucian thought the nature of *yin* is not as positive as that of *yang*. In other words, just as Huang suggests in his comments on eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty, what should be criticised is not the nature of *yin* per se, but rather the disorder caused by breaking the predetermined line between *yin* and *yang*.

The above discussion has briefly outlined how eunuchs were perceived from the standpoint of Confucian scholars. Yet categorising eunuchs’ gender role as *yin* was not the only way to view them in ancient China. From different perspectives, eunuchs may show different qualities in respect of gender. For instance, eunuchs should play a *yin* role according to the opinion of most ancient scholars, and, in fact, they were in the position of *yin* in their relationship with the emperor; however, their political importance reveals that they were not simply treated as house servants by emperors. In other words, even though Chinese scholars always recorded them as women-like figures, the emperors still valued their masculine strength. On the one hand, as palace servants, they were always given the tasks which should be undertaken by males.

⁵⁵ Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 152. “Yang was associated with light, warmth, male, day, the sun, the heavens,”

These tasks involved providing manual labour in the palace, passing information between the palace and the outside, and so on. On the other hand, as mentioned above, they were frequently trained to be the rulers' political assistants. This implies that their political significance was equal to that of men who were not castrated, rather than to women who were officials. In Chinese history, it is rare to find influential female officials, even in the Zhou Dynasty (690—705), founded by the only female emperor, Wu Zetian (武则天, 624—705).⁵⁶ Women throughout history, especially in the dynasties established by the Han ethnic group, were rarely chosen as emperors' political assistants. However, eunuchs were often found playing an important role in imperial governments.

Besides, not all the titles applied to eunuchs put more weight on their *yin* essence. Titles such as *huanguan* (宦官) and *taijian* (太监) convey a different perception of eunuchs. Moreover, *huanguan* and *taijian* are the two most common titles for eunuchs in a relatively modern Chinese context. Other ones have gradually faded out from the modern Chinese language.

The most basic meaning of *huan*, according to the *Chinese Dictionary*, is the servant of the emperor.⁵⁷ Related terms included *huanzhe* (宦者), *huanren* (宦人) and *yanhuan* (阉宦).⁵⁸ In this context, these titles are no different from those discussed before, which centre on the eunuchs' role as house slaves, rather than their political status. However, despite combining the character *huan* (宦), the title *huanguan* (宦官),

⁵⁶ The Zhou dynasty, also called the Second Zhou Dynasty, founded by the empress Wu, is different from the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046 BC – 256 BC) which followed the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600 BC – c. 1046 BC) in the Qin period. The Second Zhou Dynasty interrupted and eventually was replaced by the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907).

⁵⁷ Zhufeng Luo, ed. *Han yu da ci dian* (汉语大辞典, *Chinese Dictionary*), Vol. 3. (Shanghai: hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1988), 1418.

⁵⁸ Gu, Wu Heng Wei Qiang, 10.

which is still current to date, has a different significance from others. Actually, apart from its most basic meaning, a servant of the emperor, the character *huan* stands for a government official.⁵⁹ In the word *huanguan*, this connotation of *huan* is particularly clear, since the character *guan* (官) also refers to government officials. This being the case, the gender implication of the title *huanguan* becomes hard to define. Specifically, in their relationship with the emperor, the government officials possess the role of *yin*, while compared to common people, they occupy the position of *yang*.

Another important term *taijian* (太监) had not been used consistently to refer to eunuchs before the Ming Dynasty, even though it appeared in or before the Tang Dynasty.⁶⁰ In the Ming Dynasty, this term had typically been adopted to identify chief eunuchs. Thereafter, it became the most popular title for all eunuchs and was widely accepted by the public in the Qing Dynasty.⁶¹

Unlike most other titles, from the title *taijian* it is neither possible to observe eunuchs' physical condition of being castrated nor their social role as palace servants. As mentioned above, in the Ming Dynasty, *taijian* simply referred to eunuchs of the highest rank. This suggests that in the Ming Dynasty *taijian* was an honorific title for eunuchs. Eunuchs who ranked lower were titled as *shaojian* (少监), *zhongjian* (中监) or just called *huanguan*.⁶² Since the term *taijian* became a fixed title for eunuchs, their *yang* quality took priority in the way they were defined. Specifically, *tai* (太) and *shao* (少) were paired ideas which literally referred to senior and junior stages of a

⁵⁹ Luo, *Han yu da ci dian*, Vol. 3, 1418.

⁶⁰ Gu, *Wu Heng Wei Qiang*, 13-14.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Given the relationship among *taijian*, *zhongjian* and *shaojian*, these three titles could be literally translated as senior chief, mid-rank chief and junior chief.

developing process, and they could be used to demonstrate the different connotations of *yin* and *yang*.⁶³ Here, the character *tai* signifies a mature condition or an excessive tendency, while the character *shao* implies a nascent condition or a deficient situation. In human society, the person who obtained a high position in a clan or a social circle was always ranked *tai*, while the person who was younger than others, or who remained in a lower position, was always ranked as *shao*. In the *yin-yang* matrix, *tai* is usually categorised as *yang* while *shao* is always marked as *yin*.⁶⁴ In this case, the title *taijian* undoubtedly endowed eunuchs with the nature of *yang*.

It is hard to determine the exact reason for the wide application of the term *taijian* in the Ming and Qing dynasties. This issue is beyond the scope of this research. However, what can be observed from the usage of *taijian* is a different attitude towards power and personal value. In other words, Confucian doctrine is not the only criterion by which to judge the social status and gender role of eunuchs. Evidently, neither the eunuchs' physical condition nor their duties were changed in the Ming Dynasty, but rather the angle from which they were perceived. Prior to the title *taijian* being applied to eunuchs, their titles were more or less associated with their physical deficiency and social duty as imperial slaves. *Yanren*, *shiren*, *zhongguan*, *neichen* and *xingren* were either associated with their physical condition, or linked to their social status as palace servants. Such a way of naming them implies typical Confucian thought, which emphasises that a man's worth should be measured by his socially

⁶³ *Yin* and *yang* as two dynamic forces would experience the growth from *shao yin* and *shao yang* to *tai yin* and *tai yang*. Moreover, *tai yin* would develop into *shao yang*, while *tai yang* will develop into *shao yin*. These transformations could be summed up in a phrase *tai shao xiang sheng* (太少相生), which conveys the reciprocal transformation between *yin* and *yang*.

⁶⁴ Jiebin Zhang, *Comments and Annotations on Lei Jing Tu Yi* (类经图翼评注) (Xi'an: Shaanxi kexue jishu chubanshe, 1996), 48.
Chinese original: 《类经图翼》：“盖太者属阳，少者属阴。”
English translation: The one/thing in the stage of *tai* has *yang* character, while in the stage of *shao* has *yin* character.

valued characteristics such as filial piety and social duty. He should strictly act according to these social roles. Any deviation that may impair the hierarchical order supported by conventional morality was not allowed. However, *taijian* as a eunuchs' title cannot be assessed in the same way. The gradually increasing acceptance of *taijian* among the public during the Ming and Qing dynasties conveyed the fact that people preferred to choose an honorific term to refer to eunuchs. In other words, in late imperial China, eunuchs were commonly addressed like their most successful counterparts. This fact suggests that a logic concerning personal value rather than social value had been accepted.

Such a logic was also manifested in other affairs in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In the history of the Ming Dynasty, self-castration had grown to an uncontrollable level. Large numbers of men wanted to become eunuchs for the purpose of obtaining wealth and power. The government had even issued laws to prevent self-castration, because the number of castrated men had largely exceeded palace demand.⁶⁵ However, the tendency had not been successfully suppressed in the Ming Dynasty and the government still employed self-castrated men: Wei Zhongxian was the most notorious figure. Taisuke Mitamura argued in favour of "the official recognition of self-castration" in the Song Dynasty.⁶⁶

From the historical point of view, great changes took place during the transition from the T'ang to Sung dynasty, with the social class system of T'ang abolished and more personal liberty allowed to the people. Social position was determined by one's possessions, and a spirit of enterprise and utilitarianism was awakened.

A cultured man had only to pass the state examination in order to attain high

⁶⁵ Mitamura, *Chinese Eunuchs*, 68.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

position. Some among the lower classes, lacking the means to reach high position through the examination system, chose another road to influence—eunuchism.⁶⁷

After describing the implications of the self-castration phenomenon shown in the Song Dynasty, Mitamura stresses that “[t]his trend became stronger in the Ming era, leading one Emperor to conclude that anyone having himself castrated was only aiming [at] rank and wealth”.⁶⁸

Given the fact that an increasing number of people strived to become eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty, how the concept of eunuch was perceived underwent a great change. In other words, when eunuchism became one of the common people’s means of achieving personal worth, how the common people viewed eunuchs seems have directly influenced how they were defined. It is hard to say that the common people’s standpoint definitely influenced the wide acceptance of the title *taijian*; however, their ambition is consistent with the popularity of this term, since from the common people’s angle, eunuchs, especially those of high rank, were first and foremost successful government officials who occupied a *yang* position, rather than imperial slaves who were in the role of *yin*.

Another title widely accepted by the public and eunuchs themselves, especially in the oral language in the Ming and Qing dynasties is *gonggong* (公公), which was a term of respect for eunuchs.⁶⁹ This title clearly exhibits the perception of or

⁶⁷ Ibid., 67-68.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁹ Huaqing Yu, *Zhongguo huanguan zhidu shi* (中国宦官制度史, The History of the Political System of Eunuchs) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 10.

Dong Leng, *Bei yange de shouhu shen: huanguan yu zhongguo zhengzhi* (被阉割的守护神: 宦官与中国政治, The Castrated Patron: Eunuchs and Chinese Politics) (Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1990), 22.

expectation for eunuchs who are regarded as masculine, or *yang*. This is because the most fundamental meaning of the character *gong* (公) is the male.⁷⁰

2.3 Summary

The Chinese *yin-yang* matrix is different from the western masculine and feminine discourse; however, they have some common grounds. Despite their difference, *yin-yang* theory will play a complementary role to the masculine and feminine framework in this thesis, especially in the process of interpreting the traditional Chinese ideology. Besides, it is also worth noting that the *yin-yang* matrix in recent Chinese culture is not identical with that of antiquity. Western criteria regarding masculine and feminine have deeply affected Chinese culture as well as Chinese concepts of *yin* and *yang*. The western ideas about masculinity, which are largely based on sex division and physical appearance, have also become an important criterion by which to examine and weigh Chinese masculinity. Nowadays, the measurement of Chinese masculinity lies not only in one's social achievements, but also physical build. This partly explains why Chinese men usually look feminine in the comparison with western men. Besides, imposing western criteria on Chinese masculinity and then classing Chinese men as inferior is also a consequence of the colonial discourse.⁷¹ In the words of Song Geng, “[t]he feminized Chinese male is therefore nothing but a strategic construction in Western imagination”.⁷² This being

⁷⁰ Luo, *Han yu da ci dian*, Vol. 2, 56.

⁷¹ Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, 9.

⁷² Ibid.

the case, it is necessary to apply the *yin-yang* discourse to the study of eunuchs who have a typical Chinese cultural origin.

The discussion in the second section reveals that eunuchs' gender role in the Chinese *yin-yang* matrix varied in different periods from different standpoints. This indicates that their gender role was based on social discourse rather than biological condition. From a different point of view, the gender role has different connotations. This also indicates that eunuchs' gender role was constructed according to social expectations, which echoes the western masculine and feminine theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter. This contributes another reason to investigate filmic eunuch characters in both the masculine and feminine framework and the *yin-yang* matrix.

Chapter 3: Looking Tough

Eunuch Images, the Turbulent Sixties, and the Booming Seventies

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will deal with the eunuch images constructed in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films made in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, the eunuch figure as the chief villain with supreme political power and superb martial arts skills was initially constructed and gradually stereotyped. To date, the studies of these images are typically limited to the image of the eunuch prototype created by the director King Hu (Hu Jinquan, 胡金銓, 1932 – 1997) in 1967, and this research is mainly guided by investigation of Hu's filming skills and political views. Very little concern has been given to the eunuch prototype and other eunuch characters constructed during this period. This chapter will not only revisit Hu and his construction of the eunuch prototype from a gender perspective, but also extend the inspection to other eunuch images portrayed in this period.

The *wuxia* genre in this period underwent an unprecedented development and started to draw worldwide attention. A number of noted *wuxia* directors, such as King Hu, Chang Cheh (张彻, 1923 - 2002) and Lau Kar-leung (刘家良, 1934 - 2013), emerged in this period, and they formed the mainstay of the film industry in Hong Kong. During these two decades, eunuch characters were generally masculinised not only in their social status and martial achievement, but also in their appearance. The eunuch prototype created in 1967 looked no different from an ordinary male; in the

1970s, eunuchs in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films were even portrayed as tough guys with powerful muscles. Given eunuchs' emasculate condition, it seems unusual that these eunuchs were generally masculinised. Why did directors in this period choose to masculinise eunuchs in their films? Or, in other words, why were eunuch characters in this period expected to be masculinised? These questions contribute the first and foremost research objective of this chapter.

The 1960s and 1970s were a complicated but also crucial period not only for Hong Kong's film industry but also for Hong Kong society. Prior to the investigation of eunuchs' distinctive gender characteristics in films and why they were expected to be masculinised, it is necessary to get a general idea about Hong Kong in its political and social aspects, and the development of Hong Kong identity in this period.

After the First Opium War (1839 - 1842), Hong Kong (including Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, New Territories and the rest outlet islands) was gradually ceded or leased to Britain by the Chinese Qing (1644 - 1912) government. During the Second World War (1939 - 1945), Hong Kong had been occupied by Japan until the British government resumed its rule there. The British then continued the governance over Hong Kong till 1997. In 1984, the British and Chinese governments signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which substantially promoted the handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China in 1997.

The situation in Hong Kong in the 1960s was far from tranquil. Riots and disturbances in 1966 and 1967 clearly outlined the uneasy political environment of this place. Ian Scott, who has carefully studied Hong Kong's political changes from 1842 to 1989 and particularly focused on the crisis of legitimacy, states that the 1966 and 1967 riots were rooted in local discontent with social policies and government

corruption and “were fuelled by the Cultural Revolution in China”.¹ He defines the 1966 Hong Kong society as an “anomic” society in which “community leaders are indifferent to one’s needs” and the social order is lost.² In fact, Hong Kong governors’ indifference to Hong Kong people is not just an issue of this period, but rather a prolonged problem. Historian Frank Welsh, stresses in *A History of Hong Kong* that Hong Kong residents of Chinese ethnic origin had never been given an equivalent right to participate in the governance of Hong Kong, and that democracy had never truly been extended to Hong Kong.³ Moreover, when Britain resumed its rule in Hong Kong after Japan’s surrender, according to Welsh “the electorate of Britain didn’t care a brass farthing about Hong Kong”.⁴ The 1966 and 1967 riots, especially the students’ demonstrations and those of the working class, exposed the weakness of Hong Kong’s governing system. Thereafter, a series of reforms in public relations, civil service, labour legislation and so on, were implemented after 1968. According to Scott, the 1966 and 1967 riots and disturbances “were a watershed in Hong Kong’s political history” and “spelt the end of the unreformed colonial state”.⁵

In Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong, John M. Carroll describes Hong Kong’s social conditions in the 1970s by citing his personal experience in this period.

¹ Ian Scott, *Political Change and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong* (London: Hurst & Company, 1989), 81 – 106.

² Ibid., 83

³ Frank Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 466. This book provides a thorough and detailed description of Hong Kong history from the first Opium War to the end of Hong Kong’s colonial period, has almost become a required reading for most people in the studies of Hong Kong.

⁴ Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong* 434.

⁵ Scott, *Political Change and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong*, 81.

When I was a youngster in Hong Kong during the 1970s, one day I asked my best friend, a Chinese teenager, if he and his family would like to go with my family to a public demonstration against government corruption. My friend replied firmly that he had no interest in any such activity. People like me, he declared, should appreciate how good conditions were in colonial Hong Kong, especially compared with Mainland China, where most of his relatives lived on daily rations of rice and cabbage.⁶

Carroll's memory briefly outlines a picture of Hong Kong society in the 1970s. Although in this period the governing system was still below the expectations of Hong Kong residents, the majority population, especially those who migrated from Mainland China, were content with the living conditions there. Even though this point of view should not represent the perception of all Hong Kong residents of Chinese origin, it can at least convey the opinion of young people who grew up in Hong Kong.

In addition, the improvement of living conditions in Hong Kong cannot be separated from the economic growth of Hong Kong. After World War Two, Hong Kong successfully developed from an entrepôt trading port into an industrial metropolis. Hong Kong's industrialisation from 1946 to 1965 has been particularly studied by Chou Kai Ren, who describes Hong Kong's economic growth in these two decades as "a miracle".⁷ According to Welsh's studies, "it was during the 1960s that Hong Kong acquired what have become its typical modern attitudes" and that "money-making" became a respectable pursuit; by comparison, the "Welfare State",

⁶ John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), vii.

⁷ K. R. Chou, *The Hong Kong Economy: A Miracle of Growth* (Hong Kong: Academic Publications, 1966), 1.

Britain, was regarded as an economically sluggish kingdom.⁸ All these transformations paved the way for Hong Kong's economic boom in the 1970s, which according to Alvin Rabushka, who devoted a special attention to Hong Kong's economic freedom in this period, "reflected a peak of activity in the world economy".⁹

During these two decades, local people's Hong Kong identity also experienced a great change. For a long time since Hong Kong had become a colony of Britain, most Chinese people who migrated there from Mainland China believed that they would return to their hometowns after the war, or as soon as they had accumulated enough fortune. Steve Tsang, who particularly discusses "the emergence of a local identity" in his book about Hong Kong history, points out that these people, who were also the majority of Hong Kong's population, did not have "a local sense of identity" until they saw "the Communists gaining power in China in 1949".¹⁰ Tsang further explains that in 1950, the border control between Hong Kong and Mainland China was enforced by the government of the People's Republic of China, and permanent immigration restrictions were imposed also by the British governor.¹¹ Most Hong Kong residents of Chinese origin were forced to change their original intention to return to Mainland China, due to the border control. They gradually changed their attitude towards their social status in Hong Kong as sojourners and cared more about local affairs. Besides, the economic development and improvement of living conditions in Hong Kong gradually bred a sense of confidence and self-affirmation.

⁸ Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 462.

⁹ Alvin Rabushka, *Hong Kong: A Study in Economic Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), 3.

¹⁰ Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2007), 180 – 196.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 180.

Moreover, people who were born around the 1950s had grown to be a new generation during the 1960s and 1970s.

Those born and bred in Hong Kong since 1950 by and large had no first-hand experience of the PRC until the latter opened up in the 1970s. It was this separation that provided the conditions for a political culture and an identity of its own to build up in Hong Kong.¹²

Compared with their parents, this new generation did not have a close attachment to Mainland China or favour traditional Chinese culture. They were more interested in their vibrant popular culture, blended with western elements. However, this does not mean that the local identity in the 1960s and 1970s was close to a British identity. It was at a high level that people in Hong Kong attained a localised self-consciousness, rather than by associating with the colonial government or Communist ideology.

Unlike Tsang, Carroll argues in his work that such self-consciousness of Hong Kong “as its own place” in Hong Kong people’s identity, emerged much earlier than 1949.¹³ However, he also demonstrates that before 1949 such an identity “characterized the local Chinese bourgeoisie” rather than all the residents.¹⁴ Early in the 1800s, the local Chinese bourgeoisie had tried actively to emphasise their distinguishing Hong Kong identity in comparison to their counterparts in Mainland China.¹⁵ Informed by his understanding of these people, Carroll states that, “Hong Kong’s nature as its own was thus paradoxically shaped by its role as a space of

¹² Ibid., 181.

¹³ Carroll, *Edge of Empires*, 5.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

movement of goods and people, its relationship with South China, and its position within the British Empire”.¹⁶

Despite the different perspectives, both Tsang and Carroll’s words suggest that the sense of Hong Kong identity is variable, and that with any change emerging in the political and economic relationship between Hong Kong, Britain and China, it might be directly affected. In fact, such a situation has indeed been exhibited in terms of the ever-changing state over the past half century, and has greatly influenced the construction of Hong Kong’s popular culture. Such an influence is what this thesis intends to investigate through the study of eunuch characters in Hong Kong’s *wuxia* films.

3.2 Film synopses

Four *wuxia* films made by Hong Kong directors in the 1960s and 1970s have been selected as research targets of this chapter. They are *Dragon Inn*, *The Eunuch*, *The Traitorous* and *Ninja Wolves*. The synopses of these films are given below.

Dragon Inn (*Long Men Ke Zhan*, 龙门客栈), also known as *Dragon Gate Inn*, is a 1967 *wuxia* film. Directed by King Hu, who enjoys an excellent reputation for directing *wuxia* films, this film was a blockbuster and earned an unprecedented box office profit in Asian markets.¹⁷ Instead of recounting an unconventional story, Hu

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ In his work which particularly focuses on Hong Kong films, David Bordwell stresses that “*Dragon Gate Inn* (1967) was one of the biggest box-office successes in Southeast Asia”. See, David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000), 254.

repeats the classical motif of the conflict between hero and evil. This film begins with the scene in which the eunuch leader Cao Shaoqin (曹少钦, played by Pai Ying 白鷹) has successfully incriminated and beheaded General Yu Qian and is planning to murder Yu's children who are exiled to a desolate place called Dragon Gate (Long Men, 龙门). As the opposing force, Yu's assistants Zhu Hui (朱辉, played by Shangguan Lingfeng 上官灵凤), Zhu Ji (朱骥, played by Xue Han 薛汉) and Wu Ning (吴宁, played by Cao Jian 曹健), and the swordsman Xiao Shaozi (萧少铤, played by Shi Jun 石隽) spontaneously join together to protect Yu's children. As the story unfolds, both forces arrive at Dragon Gate and launch a battle in the Dragon Gate Inn, which is run by Wu Ning. Ultimately, this film ends with the eunuch Cao being defeated and Yu's children rescued.

Produced by The Shaw Brothers (HK) Ltd. in 1971 and directed by Yen Jung Tsu (叶荣祖), *The Eunuch* (*Gui Tai Jian* 鬼太监) evidently inherited a series of ideas from *Dragon Inn*, especially with respect to the general plot and the manner of portraying eunuchs. To be specific, the story of this film starts with the death of the

In the book centring on Taiwan cinema, Peter Rist introduces this film as follows. “*Dragon Gate Inn* had a record-breaking run of 105 days in Taipei, topping all Hong Kong and other films at the Taiwan box office, becoming the most successful Chinese-language film till then, on the island; it was also enormously successful in South Korea and Southeast Asian territories, and eventually triumphed in 1968 in Hong Kong after Run Run Shaw had deliberately delayed its release to follow Chang Che's *Come and Drink with Me* sequel, *Golden Swallow*.” See Peter Rist, “King Hu: Experimental, narrative filmmaker”, *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, popularity and state of the arts*, edited by Darrell William Davis and Ru-shou Robert Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 165-166.

According to King Hu, the English name *Dragon Inn* is mistranslated and the right name should be *Dragon Gate Inn*. Both English names have been accepted and the public has become accustomed to them. I will use *Dragon Inn* to refer to this film in this thesis, since it is this one that appears as the title in the film. See Koichi Yamada and Koyo Udagawa, *A Touch of King Hu/Hu Jinqian wu xia dian ying zuo fa* (胡金銓武侠电影作法), trans. He Li and Songzhi Ma (Hong Kong: Zheng wen she, 1998), 81-82. The book *A Touch of King Hu*, which is first written in Japanese by Koichi Yamada and Koyo Udagawa, is the first monograph about King Hu and his work. It collects a series of interviews of Hu, which covering the topics about all of Hu's representative works. Thus, this is a very important work for the studies of Hu and his work, and it has greatly influenced not only the research of Hu's films, but also the exploration of film history of Hong Kong and Taiwan in the last century.

emperor, who is completely under the control of the leading eunuch Gui Dehai (桂德海, played by Pai Ying, 白鷹). After murdering the emperor and the empress, Gui intends to consolidate his rule by eradicating the rest of royal family. Zhu Jin (朱锦, played by Tsung Hua 宗华), the eldest son, who is to succeed to the throne, becomes Gui's principal enemy. During the escape, Zhu is rescued by a knight-errant named Gongsun Bo/Green Bamboo Master (公孙伯/青竹叟, played by Yeung Chi Hing 杨志卿), who later imparts to Zhu his high martial arts skills and helps Zhu to defeat Gui. Further common ground between *Dragon Inn* and *The Eunuch* lies in the fact that Yen directly and intentionally employed Pai, who previously played the eunuch Cao, to act the part of the eunuch Gui.

The Traitorous (大太监), also named *Shaolin Traitorous*, is a 1976 Hong Kong film directed by Sung Ting-mei (宋廷美) and produced by Fortuna Films (H.K.) Co. Once again, the main storyline of the film portrays a conflict between a eunuch and two descendants of the loyal ministers who are incriminated by the eunuch. By suppressing his political opponents, the eunuch Tian Ergeng (田尔耕, played by Cheung Yick, 张翼) seizes a high government position and is authorised to command the imperial military and the secret police. In order to have revenge upon the eunuch Tian, the orphan Yang Shangyong (杨尚勇, played by Huang Chia-Da, 黄家达), the son of the minister Yang Lian, goes to the Shaolin Temple and there trains himself to be a capable warrior. With the same goal, another orphan Zuo Yunlan (左芸兰, played by Shangguan Lingfeng, 上官灵凤), the daughter of the minister Zuo Guangdou, convinces the eunuch Tian of her loyalty to him, thus becoming his

adopted daughter and learning martial arts skills from him. This story ends with the death of Tian, who is defeated by the two orphans.

Like the actor Pai Ying, who played the chief eunuch in both Hu's and Yen's films, the actor Cheung Yick (张翼) not only acted the eunuch Tian in *The Traitorous*, but also played the key eunuch in a 1979 *wuxia* film *Ninja Wolves* (锦衣卫). This film, also known as *The Wolf Boxer* or *A Pretended Rebel*, was directed by Luo Chi (罗炽, whose alias is Luo Tzou, 罗祖). As the commander of Jinyiwei (锦衣卫), the imperial military force, the eunuch Ma Tang (马堂, played by Cheung Yick, 张翼) is depicted as a powerful man with superb martial arts skills and high political influence. In order to eradicate Ma's force without arousing an insurrection, the emperor secretly places two warriors in Ma's force, who gradually become Ma's best assistants and eventually defeat him.

3.3 Are *Dragon Inn* and *Ninja Wolves* Hong Kong films or Taiwan films?

Among the four films selected as the research targets, two of them were filmed and produced in Taiwan; moreover, actors from Taiwan contributed to their main cast. These two films are *Dragon Inn* and *Ninja Wolves*. However, they will be counted as Hong Kong films in this thesis. This is not only because the directors enjoy fame as Hong Kong directors, but also because these two films, especially the way in which they depict eunuchs exhibit the achievement of Hong Kong's filmmaking techniques and ideas rather than those of Taiwan.

Hu, the director of *Dragon Inn*, who was born and raised in Beijing, migrated to Hong Kong in 1949 when he was 18 years old. Although he had accumulated extensive knowledge of the arts in Beijing, his connection with film began only when he went to Hong Kong. During the period from 1951 to 1967, he practised various filmmaking professions including assistant director, actor, screenwriter, producer and artistic designer in Hong Kong. A broad experience in filmmaking contributed to his success in directing the 1966 film *Come Drink with Me* (*Da Zui Xia*, 大醉侠) which not only made a substantial box office profit, but also brought Hu a reputation for leading the trend of making *wuxia* films of the new school “which depicted violence realistically”.¹⁸

Before Hu’s arrival in Taiwan in 1966, Taiwan’s *wuxia* films had not been a well-developed film genre. In the early and mid-1960s, Taiwan directors, influenced by Hong Kong’s *wuxia* fashion, had directed dozens of *wuxia* films. However, few of them are memorable or contributed to the establishment of a distinctive *wuxia* genre exclusively belonging to Taiwan’s film industry. In addition, introduced in a book of the film critic Song Ziwen, who systematically studied Taiwan films from the 1970s to the early 2000s, the production of *wuxia* films in Taiwan was, in most cases, taboo according to the film policy issued by Kuomintang (KMT) in the early decades after the its occupation of Taiwan from the late 1940s.¹⁹ Hu’s success in making *Dragon Inn* apparently promoted the development of Taiwan’s *wuxia* genre. However, it indirectly caused the enactment of new censorship in the year following the release of

¹⁸ Stephen Teo, *Chinese martial arts cinema: The Wuxia Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 117.

¹⁹ Ziwen Song, *Taiwan dianying sanshinia* (台湾电影三十年, *Thirty Years of Taiwan Film*) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 51.
The term Kuomintang could also be spelt as Guomingdang or Chinese Nationalist Party and its abbreviated forms are KMT and GMD.

Dragon Inn. This, according to Song, brought more restrictions to the production of the *wuxia* genre in Taiwan.²⁰ Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that this 1967 film displays the high achievement and typical features of Hong Kong's rather than Taiwan's *wuxia* genre.

For a similar reason, the 1979 film *Ninja Wolves*, which was made in Taiwan, will also be included in this research of Hong Kong film studies, for the construction of the chief eunuch in this film can be viewed as a product with features typical Hong Kong rather than Taiwan characteristics. Director Luo, even though far less famous than Hu, also commenced his filmmaking career in Hong Kong. His filmmaking experience in Hong Kong can be traced back to the late 1940s and his most productive period was the 1960s and 1970s. Prior to directing films in Taiwan, Luo had obtained considerable experience in directing the *wuxia* genre in Hong Kong. Although he began to get involved in filmmaking in Taiwan from the end of the 1960s, Luo never stopped directing films in Hong Kong. Moreover, in the 1970s, Luo was still an important member of the well-known Hong Kong film studio Golden Harvest Pictures Ltd.

As previously stated, when he directed the film *Ninja Wolves*, Luo employed the Hong Kong actor Cheung Yick, who had successfully played the eunuch Tian in Hong Kong, to perform the eunuch Ma in his film. In this process, Luo not simply inherited a Hong Kong stereotype by constructing the eunuch Ma as a horrible devil with great political power and superhuman martial arts skills; he also adopted almost every detail of the image of Tian to construct the eunuch Ma. For instance, both of them are white-haired men who are experts in fist-fighting. It is very hard to tell the

²⁰ Ibid.

difference between Ma in this film and Tian in the 1976 Hong Kong film *The Traitorous* from their appearance. All these common grounds in constructing the eunuchs indicate that, although the 1979 *Ninja Wolves* was made in Taiwan, the construction of the eunuch was initiated and characterised by Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre rather than that of Taiwan.

3.4 The masculinised eunuch prototype



Fig 3.01



Fig 3.02

When the vicious but powerful eunuch in *wuxia* genre first appeared in King Hu's 1967 film *Dragon Inn*, this character, despite his emasculated condition, is masculinised not only in his social status but also in appearance. From the film poster and the still shown above, it is clear that the eunuch Cao (the one with the red cloak on) does not match the descriptions of the eunuchs in most ancient works of literature. (Figs 3.01 & 3.02) In these works, eunuchs are likely to be described as men with typically female traits. For instance, in *Book of Latter Han* (*History of Latter Han* or

Hou Han Shu, 后汉书), compiled by Fan Ye (范晔, 398-445) in the Southern and Northern dynasties period (420-589), eunuchs are deemed to be physiologically female because of their lack of a penis.²¹ In the late Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing (1644-1912) dynasties, the scholar Tang Zhen (唐甄, 1630-1704) still describes eunuchs as having a feminine rather than a masculine appearance.²²

Admittedly, in *Dragon Inn*, Hu did not masculinise Cao as a typical “macho man” with hard muscles; however, he did nothing to feminise Cao either. Cao does not have a beard, but neither does he have female traits such as a high pitched voice, heavy makeup and ladylike gestures. Without knowing that Cao is a eunuch, it is almost impossible for audiences to doubt his manhood from his external features. Moreover, being endowed with supreme martial arts skills, Cao is further masculinised with respect to his physical build. Apart from masculinising Cao in his physical features, Hu further masculinised this character by giving him a leading social status. In *Dragon Inn*, a eunuch’s conventionally presumed role as a palace servant is not portrayed at all. Rather, he is depicted as a commander of the imperial army throughout the film. The other characters, such as the emperor, empress and prince, who are socially superior to the eunuch, do not appear and are not mentioned in this film. Although Cao cannot control everyone, he is given supreme social and political status. In this way, his dominant role, or *yang* position, is clearly constructed. In sum,

²¹ Ye Fan, *Complete Modern translation of Twenty-Four Histories: Book of Later Han* (二十四史全译: 后汉书), Vol. 1. ed. Jialu Xu (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 2004), 352.

Chinese original: 《后汉书·五行志四》: “奄官无阳施, 犹妇人也。”

English translation: *Book of Later Han*, Five Elements Part Four: “Eunuchs can be treated as women, because they have lost their male genital organs.” Translation mine.

²² Zhen Tang, *Qianshu with Annotations* (潜书注), annotated by the annotation group *Qianshu* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984), 459.

Chinese original: 唐甄《潜书·下篇下》: “彼奴也,有頄, 非男;似女, 不媚;”

English version: Zhen Tang, *Qianshu*, The Bottom Half of the Lower Part: “Although eunuchs have high cheekbones like men, they are not men; moreover, they are like women, even though they do not usually have a coquettish appearance.” Translation mine.

notwithstanding that eunuch images in most cases are likely to be feminised, the character Cao is clearly masculinised in respect of his appearance, martial arts skills and political status. Moreover, as will be seen, Hu further masculinises Cao by emphasising his privileged gaze at the beginning of the film.

Cao's power is depicted in a quite straightforward way. At the beginning of *Dragon Inn*, Hu introduces him in the title not only by employing a non-character narrator to describe his superhuman abilities, but also accompanying Cao's first appearance with operatic music. Closely following the title sequence is a scene that reveals Cao's intention to kill the exiled children of General Yu, who has just been murdered by Cao. This scene starts by presenting the misery of Yu's children, who are on their way to exile at Dragon Gate. (Fig 3.03) A low angle shot depicts the sun as scorching the innocent children. (Fig 3.04) After that, the children's backs appear in an extreme long shot. (Fig 3.05) As this shot is pulled back, Cao and his subordinates gradually appear on the screen. (Fig 3.06) Next comes a medium long shot of Cao, who is riding a horse and surrounded by a group of followers, all on horseback. (Fig 3.07) It is at this moment that Cao gives his order to hunt Yu's children.



Fig 3.03



Fig 3.04



Fig 3.05



Fig 3.06



Fig 3.07

The mise-en-scène here not only presents the main conflict of this film, but also vividly expresses the unequal status of the two parties of the conflict, with the eunuch occupying the dominant gazing position while the exiled children are located below him. Among the above pictures, Fig 3.06 best reveals such an unequal gaze relation. From behind the children, Cao stares at them just as a hunter keeps a close watch on his prey. Moreover, by positioning Cao's group on a hill while setting the children at the foot of the hill, the director further highlights Cao's gazing ascendancy. The children, however, are not given a position from which to gaze at Cao's party. Their suffering under Cao's control, with no opportunity to stare back, may be compared with their suffering under the scorching sun, whose brilliance makes it hard for them to open their eyes. (Figs 3.03 & 3.04) With his dominant privileged gaze, Cao is implicitly compared to the sun. Such an analogy bestows on Cao the nature of *yang*, because the sun in Chinese contexts is always regarded as the embodiment of *yang*.

3.4.1 Is the eunuch Cao a masculine role or a feminine role with a masculine appearance?

Although masculinising the eunuch's image seems contradictory, it is comprehensible if the director assumes that a castrated man does not have to behave like a woman, or that a eunuch does not have to be regarded as *yin* in nature. But is this what Hu assumes? His approach is difficult to define. There is a paradox in the construction of eunuch Cao. Apparently, Cao is masculinised in appearance. Nevertheless, his masculine appearance is, in fact, undermined by the director himself. When the film reaches its climax in the final fight, Hu, who is also the script writer, inserts a conversation between Cao and the protagonist Xiao. In this conversation, Xiao is given a chance to remark upon Cao's appearance:

Cao: Who is Xiao?

Xiao: That's me.

Cao: You're very imprudent.

Xiao: I have to be.

Cao: I heard you're a good fighter.

Xiao: It's enough.

Cao: You don't look a bit like it.

Xiao: You don't look like a eunuch, either.²³

Cao: How dare you!

Xiao: Don't try to scare me. I'm not one of your agents!

²³ Hu points out that a number of mistakes exist in the English subtitles of *Dragon Inn*. The article "an" before the noun "eunuch" should be one of them. This detail is also recorded in the book *A Touch of King Hu*, as introduced in footnote 17. See Yamada, *A Touch of King Hu*, 81-82.

Xiao, the protagonist of this film, is depicted by Hu as a typical *xia* character (侠). Wu Yingjun (吴迎君) believes that Xiao incarnates Hu's personal ideal.²⁴ In this regard, Wu cites Zhong Ling (钟玲), Hu's ex-wife, who states that Hu's own pursuit of loyalty and righteousness can be found in the characteristics of Xiao in *Dragon Inn*.²⁵ From the above conversation between Xiao and Cao, it is still difficult to deduce what exactly a eunuch should look like in Hu's opinion; however, it may be possible to reveal what one should not look like. In other words, Xiao's remark – "you don't look like a eunuch" – suggests that even though Hu gives the eunuch Cao a masculine appearance, he still questions his own approach through the words of his hero.

But if a eunuch should not be portrayed in a typically masculine way, what should he look like? Should he be portrayed as a woman and even considered to be female? An examination of the above conversation in the original Chinese will uncover Hu's answer, which can only be understood from the Chinese version. By comparing the English with the Chinese, one can easily discern that the former does not completely express the implications in Chinese. To be specific, in the Chinese version, when Xiao says "don't try to scare me", his words are "*bie zai wo mian qian fa ci wei*" (别在我面前发雌威), which can be literally translated as "don't try to scare me like a woman". The character *ci* (雌) in Chinese typically means the female, and it

²⁴ Yingjun Wu, *Yinyang jie: Hu Jinquan de dianying shijie* (阴阳界: 胡金铨的电影世界, *Between the Worlds of the Living and the Dead: the World in King Hu's Film*) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011), 152.

²⁵ Ibid.
Also see Ling Zhong, "King Hu's Ideal Persona", *Legendary Literature*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (2002): 70-72.

is widely used to refer to most female living creatures.²⁶ According to *Chinese Dictionary*, the term *ci wei* (雌威) connotes the power and influence exerted by women when they are losing their temper, and this expression is generally used in a derogatory sense.²⁷ Given that Cao's power is described as *ciwei*, it is reasonable to assume that director Hu is inclined to regard eunuchs as women. Evidently, Hu is not one who holds the opinion that a masculine appearance is proper for a eunuch. Additionally, he tends to treat eunuchs as essentially *yin*. Thus, his portrayal of the eunuch's masculine appearance becomes more puzzling. Why did Hu construct the eunuch Cao in a way that went against his perception of eunuchs in history? Does Hu's masculinising of the vicious eunuch show his acceptance masculine power or a disapproval of it? How should we understand the paradox embodied in the masculinisation of the eunuch?

3.4.2 The motivation of creating Cao

Prior to investigating the paradox mentioned above, it may be helpful to understand what contributes to Hu's intention to create the eunuch Cao in his film. The first monograph on King Hu, *A Touch of King Hu*, which was originally written in Japanese by Koichi Yamada and Koyo Udagawa, collects a series of interviews of Hu about his representative films. In an interview on the topic of *Dragon Inn*, Hu explains that the immediate reason for creating Cao and Cao's army derives from his antipathy towards the image of James Bond, a well-known filmic character of an officer of the British Secret Intelligence Service.²⁸ In the 1960s, the films adapted from Bond

²⁶ Zhufeng Luo, ed. *Han yu da ci dian* (汉语大词典, *Chinese Dictionary*), Vol. 11. (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1988), 838.

²⁷ Ibid., 839.

²⁸ Yamada, *A Touch of King Hu*, 86.

novels enjoyed a world-wide popularity. The Bond series was so influential that even Shao Brothers Studio could not help but become derivative and produce films with a similar theme, such as *The Black Falcon* (黑鹰, 1967) and *Kiss and Kill* (风流铁汉, 1967). Hu disapproved of glamorising a secret agent such as Bond as a hero, since Bond is authorised by the government and has the right to kill without constraint or punishment. Instead, Hu constructed images of Chinese imperial secret agents which are drawn from the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644), when powerful eunuchs were appointed as the commanders of emperors' secret agents. Hu endeavoured to reveal the absurdity of viewing these secret agents as heroes and tried to reverse such a concept by depicting the eunuch Cao and Cao's army as evil and ridiculous characters.²⁹ It is no exaggeration to say that Hu's attitude towards the influence of the Bond fashion reveals his worry about cultural invasion from the west.

Meantime, Hu's motivation for creating the eunuch image also stemmed from his sympathy for Wu Han (吴晗), a Chinese scholar who was tortured to death during the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976).³⁰ One accusation against Wu concerns his research on the secret agents of the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644). This research was interpreted as a satire of the Communist Party. Hu's response to Wu Han's tragedy and his portrayal of the secret agents in his film displays his attitude towards the Cultural Revolution and also exposes his mourning over the dying of traditional Chinese culture in this revolution.

In sum, Hu's attitude in characterising Cao is based on his concern about the cultural crises caused by the invasion of the western culture as well as the destruction

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 84

of traditional culture in Mainland China. As previously stated, Hong Kong people's national identity underwent a series of changes in the 1960s. After witnessing the indifferent attitude of the colonial governor and the instabilities fuelled by Communist movements, it was hard for the public to appreciate either the British governance or the Communist ideology. Hu's motivations for creating the eunuch Cao in his film echo with this situation.

Facing the dilemma of identifying with either colonial or Communist ideology, Hu suggests a third possibility, which is associated with traditional Chinese ethics and the ideal of the Greatness of China. This inclination can be observed in the historical themes of his films and the patriotism embodied in his narrative. Moreover, his support for traditional Chinese ideology is a consequence of his attachment to traditional culture, which started from his childhood.

Hu is a director who is well-known for his rigorous attitude towards traditional culture and historical details. His education in traditional Chinese culture and arts started from his childhood and profoundly influenced the style of his films.³¹ A family training in traditional Chinese painting and his erudition in Chinese opera can be easily recognised from his *wuxia* films. According to Hu, when he imagined the ancients, his reference was restricted to ancient works and related literary records.³² Before directing *Dragon Inn*, Hu had closely researched the dress of the Ming emperor's praetorian guards in the Ming paintings stored in the Palace Museum (Taipei).³³ This helped Hu to design the costumes for the secret agents commanded by

³¹ Rist, "King Hu: Experimental, narrative filmmaker", *Cinema Taiwan*, 164

³² Yamada, *A Touch of King Hu*, 91.

³³ The two paintings studied by King Hu name *Chujintu*(出警图) and *Rubitu* (入蹕图) which display the grand scenes of a Ming emperor's leaving and returning to the palace.³³ See Yamada, *A Touch of King Hu*, 88.

the eunuch Cao. Stephen Teo states that, “[a]t his best, Hu is a film-maker able to surround his pictures with the aura of a great tradition. Watching his pictures, one sees classical China – its paintings, opera and music. Even dramatic structures are shaped with the symmetry of a Ming vase.”³⁴

Comparing Hu’s films with those of Chang Che (张彻, 1923 - 2002) and Lau Kar-leung (刘家良, 1934 - 2013), two other master directors of *wuxia* films, David Bordwell points out that:

Steeped in historical atmosphere, Hu’s films draw upon Ming traditions of knight-errantry to provide an image of idealistic heroism that is rare in Hong Kong cinema. If Chang Che’s heroes are defined by male friendship and Lau Kar-leung’s by their dedication to the Shaolin heritage, King Hu’s heroes fight for a cause – most often, patriotic loyalty – and they protect the weak and innocent.³⁵

But rather than claiming that Hu’s heroes possess typical patriotic ideals, it might be more impartial to say that these heroes are always involved in stories with a patriotic theme. In other words, though loyalty to the nation is a quality generally possessed by most heroes, not all films provide opportunities for heroes to show their patriotism. Hu was particularly interested in the theme of fighting for one’s nation and was willing to present his opinion by creating plots that allow his characters to demonstrate their patriotism.

³⁴ Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong: The Extra Dimension* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 96.

King Hu took a particular interest in Chinese history, especially in the history of the Ming Dynasty. Including *Dragon Inn*, almost half of Hu’s *wuxia* films were set in the background of the Ming Dynasty. Relevant films also involve *A Touch of Zen* (侠女, 1970), *The Valiant Ones* (忠烈图, 1975) and *The Wheel of Life* (大轮回, 1983).

³⁵ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 255.

3.4.3 The masculine ideal

As a director who advocates traditional ideology, Hu has a typical traditional view of ideal masculinity. Traditionally, possessing *wen* and *wu* qualities in a harmonious way is accepted as the most ideal model of masculinity. Stephen Teo, in his analysis of the character Wu, the owner of the Dragon Gate Inn, states that, “[i]n this characterisation of Wu, Hu suggests a certain harmony between *wen* and *wu* values.”³⁶ According to Kam Louie, *wen* “refers to those genteel, refined qualities that were associated with literary and artistic pursuits of the classical scholars”, and *wu* is “a concept which embodies the power of military strength but also the wisdom to know when and when not to deploy it”.³⁷ However, *wen* and *wu* attributes were by no means equally valued in traditional Chinese culture, and this situation is even true nowadays. Louie stresses that “right from the beginning of Chinese philosophical thought, *wen* was considered superior to *wu*”.³⁸ Furthermore, “*wu* is inferior to *wen*” as it represents “the need to resort to force to achieve one’s goal”.³⁹ Even though *wu* is indispensable in the *wuxia* genre, it can be a merit only when it is applied in a harmonious way rather than used excessively. In the film *Dragon Inn*, eunuch Cao is portrayed as having typical *wu* features. In Teo’s words, “[t]he villain Cao Shaoqin is seen as a man who relies totally on violence or military means (*wu*), thus he is someone who is against the harmony of nature. The fact that he is a eunuch reinforces his unnatural presence.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Teo, *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema*, 128.

³⁷ Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Social and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁰ Teo, *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema*, 128.

Based on his study of Hu's films, Song Ziwen stresses that glorifying violence should not be the keynote of the *wuxia* genre; instead, its motive should be to re-establish lost virtues.⁴¹ However, Cao is characterised as lacking traditional virtues such as loyalty, filialness, benevolence and righteousness, which in Hu's mind are the core of cultural subjectivity. Song further states that what Hu wants to highlight in his *wuxia* films is the valuable virtues of humanity rather than violence, and that these lost virtues are traditional merits which should not be profaned.⁴² This is also a key reason for Hu's constantly highlighting female images, such as Golden Swallow in the 1966 film *Come Drink with Me* and Yang Hui-ching in the 1971 film *A Touch of Zen*. Hu believes that despite being vulnerable in society, women are a symbol of greatness for their kindness and tolerance, and it is these virtues that guarantee the harmony of a society.⁴³ Furthermore, excessively masculinising the vicious eunuch may be viewed as evidence of Hu's disapproval of the quality of *yang*, which could bring disorder rather than harmony to the power structure. Given the construction of Cao as the chief villain, it is reasonable to say that, in the turbulent 60s, Hu tried to bring order back from chaos. Rather than following a colonial or a communist ideology, he armed himself with traditional Chinese ideology.

3.4.4 Being an intellectual

Hu is not a politician, but an intellectual. His patriotic sentiments are based on his deep concern over the Greatness of China, rather than a particular political attachment to KMT, Communist Party of China (CPC) or the British governor.⁴⁴ However, it is

⁴¹ Song, *Thirty Years of Taiwan Film*, 68.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The term Communist Party of China could also be spelt as Chinese Communist Party, and its abbreviated forms are CPC and CCP.

inevitable that his films, being made in a tumultuous age, should be interpreted from a political perspective. Teo points out that the script of *Dragon Inn* fits in with “the GMD regime and its political struggle with the CCP”.⁴⁵ In this story, Yu Qian’s exiled children symbolise “the GMD government-in-exile”, while their confrontation with the eunuch Cao and his army allegorises “the conflict between the GMD and the Chinese Communist Party”.⁴⁶ Yu’s party obviously symbolises “freedom forces” while Cao’s force typifies “an authoritarian government”.⁴⁷ Teo’s analysis is not baseless, since Hu himself did claim that his interest in constructing the powerful eunuch was partly aroused by the indictment of Wu Han for his intention to satirise the CPC through his research into Ming secret agents.⁴⁸ However, Hu’s construction of the eunuch Cao makes a criticism of the governance of the CPC, such an approach could hardly be interpreted as political compliance with the regime of the KMT. According to Hu’s explanation, his joining in with the Union Film studio in Taiwan was by no means a response to the call of the KMT, but simply a reaction to the Union Film’s staff-poaching strategy.⁴⁹ Moreover, the inn that appeared in Hu’s films could also be explained as a metaphor for Taiwan, since both the dragon gate inn in the film and Taiwan itself are steeped in a turbulent political and social atmosphere. After seeing *Dragon Inn*, Chiang Ching-kuo (蒋经国, 1910 - 1988), the President of the Republic of China from 1978 to 1988 and son of the Generalissimo and President Chiang Kai-shek (蒋介石, 1887 - 1975), immediately pointed out that this film is a

⁴⁵ Teo, *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema*, 124.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Yamada, *A Touch of King Hu*, 84.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

reactionary work which nevertheless involves clear left-wing standpoints.⁵⁰ Analysed by Song Ziwen, Chiang's judgement is reasonable, since Taiwan in those days was like the bandits' inn of the film, where all kinds of people gathered mingling with and cannibalising each other.⁵¹

Teo stresses that Hu's "affinity with ancient history is a sign of his alienation from the present, a condition exacerbated by exile from his northern Chinese roots."⁵² In Hong Kong, as well as in Taiwan and Mainland China, the social situation was unstable during the 1960s. Different political forces and different ideologies brought constant chaos. It is not surprising that, under such circumstances, the traditional cultural ideology Hu received when he was in north China may appear as a contrast with the disordered present. Wu Yingchun reveals that what Hu guards is more like a cultural homestead than a political homestead; and through the restoration of the turbulent Ming Dynasty in the films, Hu tried to look for a way out of the tumultuous cultural and social situation of all intellectuals.⁵³ Hu's observation of the world, history and the eunuch comes from the perspective of an intellectual who respects and wishes to maintain traditional Chinese ideology. This not only indicates that traditional values, especially the Confucian values held by most ancient scholars, were important for Hu, but also implies that a dualistic power structure may be brought in to help bring order back from chaos.

This dualistic power structure is visible in the construction of the eunuch, especially the portrayal of the eunuch's powerful gaze. Granting the privilege of the

⁵⁰ Song, *Thirty Years of Taiwan Film*, 73.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 88.

⁵³ Wu, *Between the Worlds of the Living and the Dead*, 45.

gaze to the eunuch does not imply that a eunuch-centred power structure is working. In this story, the eunuch is neither treated as a woman nor an emasculated man. He looks no different from a man. This suggests that his power operates through a male-oriented gaze pattern. However, rather than being driven by erotic visual pleasure, such a male-oriented gaze pattern serves to emphasise a clear hierarchal order that underlies the plot. The scene presenting the relationship between the eunuch and the exiled children clearly portrays such a dualistic order. When Hu depicts the unequal gaze relationship between these two parties, he chooses not to stand on the side of the children, but the side of the eunuch. However, Hu does not directly take the point of view of Cao, but rather depicts his dominance over the children at a short distance. For instance, Fig 3.06 clearly objectifies the dualistic relation between the subject and object of the gaze as the relationship between the dominant eunuch and the passive children. From Fig 3.05 to 3.06, what Hu conveys here is not an intention to identify with the ruler or the ruled, but rather presenting the hierarchical order between the two parties.

The fact that privileged social roles using the gaze to implement their dominance is not the norm which first appeared in films. This dualistic pattern has long been formulated in Chinese traditional culture. For instance, the well-known idiom *Ju'an Qimei* (举案齐眉) from *Book of the Later Han* (后汉书) clearly reveals the disparate privileges of the gaze between husband and wife, whose social roles were given different emphases according to Confucian doctrine. Literally, this idiom recounts that when the wife Meng Guang serves food to her husband Liang Hong, she lifts the food tray up to the level of her eyebrows. Liang and Meng's stories have been frequently quoted in various Chinese contexts with the purpose of highlighting the mutual

respect between husband and wife.⁵⁴ However, apart from presenting the courtesy between husband and wife, *Ju'an Qimei* also depicts a wife's inferior role in the gaze relationship with her husband.

The unequal looking privileges between dominant and subordinate roles can also be discerned from the codes issued to regulate people's behaviour in front of their emperor. Taking the rules of etiquette of the Ming Dynasty as an example, according to the *Veritable Records of Ming Taizu* (明太祖实录), people, including officials and commoners, were not allowed to look at the emperor or his chariot when they met him outside the imperial palace.⁵⁵ They are neither allowed to stand in the way of the emperor, nor to open their doors to look at him.⁵⁶ People must kneel down and look down.⁵⁷ Anyone who looked directly at the emperor or his chariot would be bludgeoned hundreds of times.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ye Fan, *Complete Modern translation of Twenty-Four Histories: Book of Later Han* (二十四史全译: 后汉书), Vol. 3. ed. Jialu Xu (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 2004), 1670 - 1673. Chinese original: 《后汉书·逸民传》: “为人赁舂, 每归, 妻为具食, 不敢于鸿前仰视, 举案齐眉。”

English translation: *Book of Later Han*, Biographies of Hermits: “Every time when Liang Hong comes home after his work of hulling grain for the wealthy landlord, his wife Meng Guang prepares food for him. Meng does not venture to look straight at Liang when she serves food, but lifts the food tray up to the level of her eyebrows.” Translation mine.

⁵⁵ Lun Dong, Jin Xie and Guang Hu and so on, *Records of Ming Taizu* (明太祖实录), (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo 1962), 1338. Digital Scripta Sinica.

⁵⁶ Chinese original: 《明太祖实录》卷七十三: “皇帝车架出入, 有司肃清街道, 官民不许开门观望行立, 所在父老合迎驾者于仗外路右扣头俯伏, 候车架前行方起;车架行处有冲入仗内者, 绞;行立观望者杖百;”。

English version: *Records of Ming Taizu*, Volume Seventy Three: “People who are in the emperor's way have to leave before the emperor's chariot arrives. Neither officials nor common people are allowed to open their doors to watch the emperor and his chariot. People who are given permission to welcome the emperor need to kneel down and kowtow at a prescribed distance on the right of the emperor's way. They are not allowed to stand up before the chariot has passed. Anyone who oversteps the prescribed boundary will be hanged. Anyone, who looks directly at the emperor or his chariot, will be bludgeoned hundreds of times.” Translation mine.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

In western culture, the French philosopher Michel Foucault theorises the power relationship between the subject and the object of the gaze in his work *Discipline and Punish*. By introducing Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, he points out that "[p]ower has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes".⁵⁹ Rather than applying violent methods, such as physical torture, the concept of the panopticon, which was conceived by Bentham, conveys a different way to achieve control. This allows a few guardians or supervisors to regulate a large group of inmates, with the former watching freely without being seen, and the latter always acting as though they are watched without being able to see the watchman. This being the case, the feeling of being watched constantly is internalised in the consciousness of the inmates. This is to say, both the watchman and the watched co-create the control or the power. In his analysis of the panopticon, Foucault defines the panoptic mechanism as "a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad".⁶⁰ Although Foucault's investigation into the panopticon mainly serves to explore the evolution of discipline, it outlines the relation between the power mechanism and the dyad of gaze. Power, in other words, comes from the knowledge that is controlled by the watchman. To put this mechanism in the context of hierarchical social relations, the see/being seen dyad could be always found in the power structure with the ruler having the power to see, and the ruled presuming to be seen. In the film *Dragon Inn*, masculinising the eunuch Cao as a dominant gazer mainly serves to construct the dualistic hierarchical order, rather than highlighting Cao's masculinity.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (A Division of Random House, New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 202.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 201-202.

3.5 Identifying with the eunuch or not?



Fig 3.08



Fig 3.09

In the 1971 film *The Eunuch*, Yen Jung Tsu inherited Hu's way of constructing the eunuch in almost every aspect. The eunuch Gui in *The Eunuch* is also given an unparalleled gazing privilege and the dualistic gaze pattern is frequently adopted to portray the relationship between the characters with different social statuses. However, Yen went further than Hu. As well as bestowing the eunuch Gui the gazing power over other characters, Yen shows an inclination to take the viewing angle of Gui in the film. Does this mean Yen tried to identify with the eunuch?

Like the key eunuch character in the 1971 film *The Eunuch*, Gui Dehai is not feminised by Yen. (Figs 3.08 & 3.09) Gui (the man in the red clothes) looks like a man whose manhood could hardly be doubted not only from his external features, but also from his outstanding martial arts abilities. Moreover, Gui has supreme political

status. Unlike the film *Dragon Inn*, in which there is no character who is politically higher than the eunuch Cao, the film *The Eunuch* includes an emperor and an imperial concubine as well as princes. However, to a great extent, these characters serve as a contrast to Gui's uncontrollable political power. Gui usurps the imperial authority by murdering the emperor, his concubine and the younger prince. By doing this, Gui seizes an absolutely *yang* position. But, his masculine role which manifests in his abuse of the supreme political power is certainly not worthy of praise.



Fig 3.10



Fig 3.11



Fig 3.12



Fig 3.13

Yen also masculinises eunuch Gui by bestowing on him a privileged gaze. This film starts by presenting the key eunuch Gui, who is guarded by his army. In this scene, Gui is invited to visit the official Liu Guosheng (刘国生, played by Huang Chung-Hsin, 黄宗讯) who is the brother of an imperial concubine. In order to show his flattery, Liu travels for a long time to meet Gui. Fig 3.10 best represents the scene when Liu has just met Gui. Gui sits in his palanquin which is positioned above Liu. (Fig 3.13) Liu and other officials lower their heads and kneel down to salute Gui. (Fig 3.10) This scene clearly depicts the relationship between Gui, who gazes down, and Liu, who is gazed at. Gui's political power contributes to his ruling position over

other officials in the film. Therefore, it is not surprising that Gui is given a privileged position of the gaze when he meets Liu. However, it is one thing that Gui's dominance is highlighted; it is quite another that his viewing angle is adopted to promote the story telling. In this film, Gui's elevated visual angle has been repeatedly adopted in the narrative.

When Gui meets the official Liu, there is an over-the-shoulder shot for more ten seconds taking Gui's viewpoint as he watches Liu and other officials saluting him. (Fig 3.10) The following shot implies that there is no room for a third person to fit into the narrow space between Gui and the back board of the palanquin. (Fig 3.11) Therefore, such an over-the-shoulder shot conveys what Gui can see and renders his strongly subjective sense of power.



Fig 3.14



Fig 3.15



Fig 3.16



Fig 3.17

In Liu's home, Gui encounters the assassin Ruan Wu (阮五, played by Simon Chui Yee-Ang, 徐二牛), who disguises himself as a chef. When Ruan holds a fish and kneels down in front of Gui, the camera is again placed right behind Gui. However, unlike the previous scene, the camera is a few metres away from Gui.

Instead of presenting Gui's point of view, this shot re-establishes the *mise-en-scène* displayed in Fig 3.10, and re-emphasises Gui's dominant position. But this does not mean that director Yen has given up the employment of Gui's high viewpoint in the remaining part of this scene.

Closely following the shot which re-establishes Gui's power is a shot of the fish from Ruan's angle. (Fig 3.14) At this point, Ruan is holding a fish in whose belly a dagger is hidden, and is moving towards Gui. This is a good visual angle to depict how Ruan, the assassin, secretly stares at Gui, his intended victim. However, Gui's image appears only partially and is out of focus. As the focus of this shot intensively centres on the fish, it is hard for audiences to get a clear feeling of Ruan's aggressive intention and his threat to Gui; rather, audiences are easily distracted by the mysterious fish. (Fig 3.15) Just at the moment when Ruan removes the dagger from the fish, the shot is reversed. (Fig 3.16) When this reverse shot is made, the camera is placed right behind Gui again, and this time, it moves closer to Gui compared with its position in Fig 3.14. Such a quick shot reversion prevents audiences from identifying with Ruan. This cut comes so quickly that Ruan is portrayed as still trying to throw away the plate after extracting the dagger. Ruan's body movements are totally exposed to Gui in the shot filmed from Gui's side; meanwhile, Gui's calm response to the sudden attack and the control of his gaze over Ruan's assault can clearly be observed. Then, at the very moment when Ruan stabs at Gui, Gui quickly jumps over Ruan's head and lands behind him. Immediately, the shot angle changes. Rather than continuing to shoot from Gui's original place and portraying Gui and Ruan's fight from distance, the shot follows Gui from the opposite direction. (Fig 3.16) This is another over-the-shoulder shot with Gui's visual angle being adopted once again. The approach of following Gui's point of view to tell the story makes Ruan's assassination

look disempowered. In contrast, although Gui is being assaulted, he partly takes the role of a narrator as his visual angle is constantly employed; this makes Gui an active character who not only occupies but also controls the development of the story along with the destiny of the other characters.

If the employment of Gui's viewing angle is closely associated with his hierarchical superiority, one might assume that such an angle would not be taken when he encounters one who is politically superior to him. However, the opposite is true. When eunuch Gui meets the emperor, he is portrayed as still tightly holding the dominant gaze. Evidently, the director is also inclined to take Gui's visual angle to advance the plot.



Fig 3.18



Fig 3.19



Fig 3.20



Fig 3.21



Fig 3.22



Fig 3.23



Fig 3.24



Fig 3.25



Fig 3.26

After realising that the assassination attempt is inspired by King Chu (楚王, played by Luo Wei), Gui returns to the palace immediately and plans to murder him. When Gui and his followers enter the hall where King Chu presides, their figures appear in a wide-angle shot filmed from a camera standing left behind King Chu, who is sitting in his throne. (Fig 3.18) This is an ideal angle to present King Chu's privileged gaze, from a higher position, over the eunuch Gui. Moreover, Gui, as a eunuch, politically inferior to King Chu, should be in a passive being-gazed-at position when he meets the king. However, the following shot immediately discloses that King Chu has not realised Gui's entrance, and his attention is still focused on the paper in his hands. (Figs 3.19 & 3.20) As soon as King Chu notices Gui's entrance, the cut moves within one second from a medium field shot of King Chu to a close-up of Gui. (Fig 3.21) Although the close-up of Gui comes after King Chu's notice of his arrival, it can hardly be explained as a shot depicting what King Chu sees. Because between these two roles there is a long distance, the face of Gui as it appears in the king's eyes cannot be very clear. Instead, the close-up of Gui directly conveys Gui's emotion.

The following long field shot of King Chu can be understood as a reflection of what Gui sees. (Fig 3.22) This is not simply because the focus of the camera keeps tracking King Chu's image, just as Gui keeps staring at King Chu, but also because the distance between these two characters is clearly considered by the director and framed in this long shot of King Chu. Moreover, with Gui's stepping forth, the camera moves forward at the same pace. (Figs 3.22 & 3.23) This implies that even though Gui encounters the king, the director endows him, rather than the king, with the power of the gaze and tends to employ the eunuch's point of view to propel the action.

After entering the palace hall, Gui walks directly towards and finally stands in front of King Chu, eye-to-eye at the same level and a conversation between these two characters starts. (Fig 3.24) Gui shows King Chu the dagger which belongs to King Chu yet was found being carried by the assassin Ruan and was used to stab Gui. (Fig 3.25) King Chu tries to defend himself by denying his awareness of losing the dagger. But Gui does not believe the king and compels him to drink poisoned wine. During this conversation, the shot/reverse shot tactic is applied, with Gui and King Chu's figures being favoured alternately. When the tension between them begins to mount, the cutting stops at a shot filmed from right behind Gui, who is holding the wine for the king and forcing him to drink. (Fig 3.26) The angle is in line with that displayed by Figs 3.10, 3.14, 3.16 and 3.25, and makes this shot look like another re-establishing shot, in which Gui's dominance is again stressed.

In the three consecutive scenes, Gui's viewpoint is constantly employed. Do the frequent employments of Gui's viewing angle expose the director's intention of identifying with Gui? Considering that Gui is a eunuch and is also portrayed as a

villain who not only kills the emperor for power, but also tries to murder his wife and daughter, it would be irrational to deduce that the director wants to encourage the audience to identify with this eunuch. What, then, is the reason for the director to frequently employ Gui's viewing angle? Is Gui a special eunuch, different from other eunuchs? The answer to the latter question might be no, since Yen imitated all the characteristics of Cao as created by Hu. The latter character was so popular that Yen invited Pai Ying, the actor who played Cao, to play eunuch Gui. Thus Gui would seem to be a replica of the eunuch Cao. Nonetheless, Hu and Yen's motivations for constructing these two eunuchs are quite different. Previous analysis reveals that although Hu's motivation for creating Cao arises in part in response to market requirements, at a fundamental level it is based on Hu's patriotism and his concern for traditional Chinese ideology. As will be seen in the ensuing discussion, Yen attaches greater importance to market needs when he characterises Gui.

Pai is treated as a significant selling point for Yen's film. In the title sequence of *The Eunuch*, Pai's name is put first in the list of credits. The film's title also clearly states that the eunuch will be the primary character of this film, even though he is a villain. Making a vicious eunuch the most important selling point conveys that even though the theme of this film is still the struggle between good and evil, the traditional ideology such as achieving righteousness and justice may not be the sole focus. Constructing an eye-catching eunuch image is likewise no less important.

Besides this, the collective spirit embodied in *Dragon Inn* was dismissed, while the individual's achievement was emphasised in *The Eunuch*. This variation can be observed in the duels in the two films. Investigating the decisive combat in *Dragon Inn*, the Hong Kong film critic and filmmaker Lau Tai-muk (刘大木/刘明德) stresses

that “all good guys join hands in combating against the big villain. ... More important is the team spirit.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, Yen did not copy the many-to-one fighting model at the end of *The Eunuch*. The final combat is a one-to-one battle between eunuch Gui and prince Zhu Jin. Zhu’s martial arts tutor Gongsun Bo does not offer a hand but rather stays out of the combat. Moreover, Gongsun insists that this should be a one-to-one combat, and Zhu has to take back the imperial power by himself. The emphasis on an equal combat between Gui and Zhu highlights not only Zhu’s personal capability, but also the individual effort of Gui. Although they are representatives of good and evil, underlining their equal combat implies that Gui’s power also comes from his personal efforts and should be admired. Moreover, Gui has an equal right to defend his power. The personal value in this scene is high.

The appreciation of personal achievement could be traced in the Hong Kong films made in the 1960s. Lau points out that in the film *Dragon Inn*, such appreciation can be found in the construction of the heroic image of Xiao. Although Lau’s analyses of *Dragon Inn* are somewhat self-contradictory, they still give a general idea about the transformation of Hong Kong films in the 1960s and 1970s.

When the economy becomes stable, the problem of “bread and butter” tends to be less important. Instead, how to display achievements is the main concern. In *Dragon Inn* (1968), Hong Kong people’s desire for showing off publicly was projected onto the scene where Xiao Shaozi (Shi Jun) displayed his martial arts

⁶¹ Tai-muk Lau, “Conflict and Desire ---- Dialogues Between the Hong Kong Martial Arts Genre and Social Issues in the Past 40 Years”, *The Making of Martial Arts Films ---- As Told by Filmmakers and Stars* (电影口述历史展览之《再见江湖》), Edited by Winnie Fu, presented by the Provisional Urban Council and organised by the Hong Kong Film Archive (Hong Kong: Xianggang dianying ziliaoguan, 1999), 32.

skills implicitly to contend with the court guards. From then on, similar scenes had been seen once and again. The newly-born bourgeois fledged.⁶²

A similar approach was fairly obvious in the construction of eunuch Gui. Generally speaking, Gui is an evil character and his vicious characteristics can hardly arouse the audience's sympathy. Moreover, as a eunuch, Gui usurps imperial power, and this is definitely not worthy of praise according to the traditional ideology. However, also in the film, the eunuch Gui is constructed as one who not only has superb martial arts skills but is also skilled in strategy. He is good at dealing with enemies with tactics rather than only by force. No matter whether he encounters the assassin or the emperor, he behaves calm and confident. Additionally, it is easy to find that along with the employment of Gui's visual angle, the close-up shot is frequently used to emphasise Gui's confident but also ruthless expression, like the full face exhibited in Fig 3.21.

It now becomes easier to understand why the eunuch Gui's point of view is frequently employed. Rather than regarding such employment as the director's identification with the eunuch, it might be reasonable to comprehend it as an expression of the approval of individual value. In other words, such employment renders a strong directorial intention of standing at the side of the powerful individual and adopting the viewpoint of the winner or the stronger. This intention is inseparable from Hong Kong's rapid development, which largely benefited from the efforts of local residents of Chinese origin.

The 1970s is the period in which "a generation of self-made billionaires" appeared in Hong Kong. "It raised the profile and self-respect of the local Chinese".⁶³

⁶² Ibid., 32.

A large group of successful Chinese entrepreneurs gained status in the middle class in the decade between 1971 and 1981 due to the economic boom.⁶⁴ The speed of Hong Kong's economic growth was much faster than that of Britain. This undoubtedly bred a sense of self-affirmation, confidence and pride. "A Hong Kong way of life", rather than a British or a Communist lifestyle, was becoming visible".⁶⁵ Therefore, the emphasis on individual achievement conveys a struggle for developing a localised sense of Hong Kong identity. Taking the point of view of the winner, instead of the political superior in the traditional sense, renders a positive attitude towards personal strivings.

3.6 The eunuch images on the male-centred screen

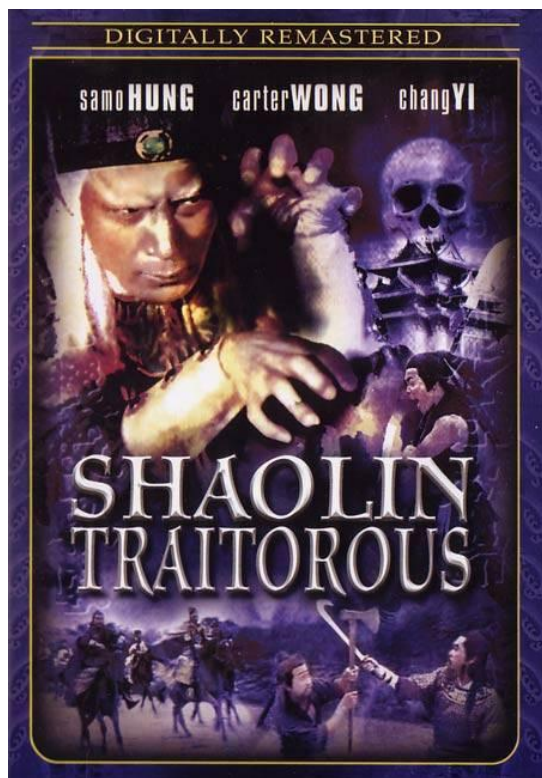


Fig 3.27



Fig 3.28

⁶³ Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, 192.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

During the latter half of the 1970s, eunuch images made in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films were gradually stereotyped. The typical characteristics of the eunuch prototype created in 1967 were kept. Eunuch images produced in the late 1970s were still portrayed as chief villains with high political status and matchless martial arts skills. However, some obvious changes in the portrayal of eunuchs were also made beside the inheritance of the main characteristics.

From the posters of the 1976 film *Shaolin Traitorous* and the 1979 film *Ninja Wolves*, it is easy to notice that compared with the eunuch images in *Dragon Inn* and *The Eunuch*, these latter images, (both of them have white hair in the posters), are masculinised in appearance to a more obvious level. (Figs 3.27 & 3.28) The chief eunuchs in both films are played by Cheung Yick, who is not only a famous actor for playing in martial arts films in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, but also a Taekwondo master in real life. These qualities make Cheung a martial arts icon. In these two films, Cheung's eunuch characters are also kung fu masters, who always get involved in the fist-fighting, rather than swordplay experts. Even though both kung fu fighting and sword wielding are important combat forms in the *wuxia* genre, they have different gender implications. Generally, in the history of Chinese martial arts cinema, the swordplay tradition is likely to be associated with the "soft" school which emphasises "inner skills", while the kung fu tradition is closely connected to the "hard" school which highlights "outer physical skills".⁶⁶ In Teo's words, "swordfighting itself is thought to be more feminine in contrast with kung fu which is more masculine".⁶⁷ On this point, Cheung's eunuch images are more masculine than Pai's eunuch images.

⁶⁶ Teo, *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema*, 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

According to David Desser, from the 1960s to the 1970s, there was “distinct shift away from swordplay in favor of kung fu” in Hong Kong’s *wuxia* genre.⁶⁸ In the book *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, a collection in exploring the representations of masculinity in Hong Kong cinema, the editor Pang Laikwan stresses that, the shift from swordplay to kung fu coincides with the general transition of “a phasing out of female-audience-oriented productions” and meanwhile “a phasing in of those reflecting prominent male tastes and ideologies” in Hong Kong cinema.⁶⁹ During this period, fewer romantic comedies could compete with martial arts products and fewer actresses could achieve higher status than the popular kung fu actors. Young audiences with an appetite for violence became important film-goers.⁷⁰ All these tendencies reveal that male ideologies dominated not only the production of *wuxia* genre, but also Hong Kong cinema as a whole during the late 1960s and the 1970s.

The noted director Chang Cheh, who pioneered the *yanggang* (阳刚) or masculine style in *wuxia* films, claims this:

The rise of *yanggang* was a requirement of the market and not discrimination against actresses. Female audiences also wanted to see male stars. ... The 60s and 70s were the most energetic periods of Hong Kong – the period when young people exerted themselves. The age of love tales was past. The masses were striving ahead in a rebellious mood and the colonial administration was receiving

⁶⁸ David Desser, “Making Movies Male: Chang Che and the Shaw Brothers Martial Arts Movies, 1965 – 1975”, *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, Edited by Laikwan Pang & Day Wong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005) 28.

⁶⁹ Laikwan Pang, “The Diversity of Masculinities in Hong Kong Cinema”, *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, Edited by Laikwan Pang & Day Wong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 8.

⁷⁰ Desser, “Making Movies Male”, 24.

a shock to the system. *Yanggang* and the martial arts pictures represented this spirit of the times.⁷¹

What also deserves attention is that, at the same time, Hu's films using a relatively *yinrou* (阴柔) or feminine style obtained a huge success. Hu made an undeniable contribution in refurbishing *wuxia* films by utilising stylised operatic combat and developing images of female martial artists. However, Dessser argues that it was not Hu's soft style but Chang Cheh's hard style in filmmaking that had an immediate influence on Hong Kong's martial arts films.⁷² From the late 1960s to the end of the 1970s, even up to the 1980s, a number of muscular male characters with hard-edged profiles incessantly appeared in Hong Kong films. These men include Wang Yu (王羽), Lo Lieh (罗烈), Alexander Fu Sheng (傅声), Qi Kuan-chun (戚冠军), Ti Lung (狄龙), Huang Chia-Da (黄家达) and so on, and of course Bruce Lee (李小龙) and Jackie Chan (成龙). Cheung Yick, the eunuch portrayer, having a similar tough look, was also contemporary with them and one of these hard men.

The *yanggang* vogue had a profound impact on both *Shaolin Traitorous* and *Ninja Wolves*. The cast of *Shaolin Traitorous* not only involves "tough guys" such as Cheung Yick, Huang Chia-Da and Sammo Hung (洪金宝), but also includes the actress Shangguan Lingfeng, who is primarily known for her fighting role in *Dragon Inn*, in which Shangguan plays an excellent swordswoman. In the film *Shaolin Traitorous*, although Shangguan also acts as an important female fighter, her weapons are just two daggers and she scarcely uses them. The character she plays fights with

⁷¹ Cheh Chang, "Creating the Martial Arts Film and the Hong Kong Cinema Style", *The Making of Martial Arts Films ---- As Told by Filmmakers and Stars* (电影口述历史展览之《再见江湖》), Edited by Winnie Fu, presented by the Provisional Urban Council and organised by the Hong Kong Film Archive (Hong Kong: Xianggang dianying ziliaoguan, 1999), 21.

⁷² Dessser, "Making Movies Male", 17 – 18.

bare hands in most cases. The character played by Shangguan in *Shaolin Traitorous* is the daughter adopted by the chief eunuch, who is not only her enemy for murdering her parents, but also her benefactor who brought her up and imparted her high kung fu skills. Although in the film *The Eunuch*, Gui is given the role of father, Gui never performs the duty of a father. Unlike Gui, eunuch Tian in *Shaolin Traitorous* is a de facto a father who raises and guides his adopted daughter. Such a role definitely masculinised eunuch Tian in this film. However, the daughter Zuo's revenge intention never diminished. Seeking refuge with the eunuch is part of her revenge plan.

In order to defeat Tian, Zuo collaborates with Yang Shangyong, whose parents have also been murdered by Tian, and kills Tian's most capable assistants. When Tian starts to suspect that Zuo might be the traitor, Zuo launches a pre-emptive strike, yet immediately fails. This is a combat where there is great disparity in strength between the two sides. Even though Zuo assaults Tian with two daggers, Tian easily wins by fighting without using weapon. (Figs 3.29 & 3.30) He has never worn any weapons, as his arms themselves are his weapons, as shown in Fig 3.31.



Fig 3.29



Fig 3.30



Fig 3.31

The strength of the eunuch's body is greatly emphasised. This is not only embodied in the short combat between Tian and Zuo, but also reflected in the final battle in which Tian fights both Zuo and Yang at the same time. This is an extended fight. Most time of this scene is devoted to the showing of how strong the eunuch is, until Zuo thrusts her dagger through Tian's arm. The eunuch's strength declines with surprising rapidity after he loses one arm. Only one minute is used to depict how Tian is beaten to death after losing the arm. Then the film ends with a shot of Tian's mutilated body. This is quite a hasty ending, which in consideration of Tian's superb kung fu skills cannot be fully justified. As previously stated, the eunuch's arms are like his weapons. It is rational to deduce that once he loses his arm, his ability declines. However, with more exploration of the eunuch image, it seems that the loss of one arm has more significance than this.

By closely investigating Tian's fighting scenes, it is not hard to find that almost every time Tian launches an attack, a close up shot is made to display his tiger-like pose, which is a masculine pose, as the tiger signifies *yang* in Chinese mythology. His two arms are like two claws of a tiger. Such a pose is not only displayed in films, but also in the film poster. (Fig 3.27) This implies that the eunuch Tian and his fighting scenes are important selling points. In other words, Tian's body and his movements are significant spectacles. His masculine tiger-like pose with his arms imitating the claws of tiger undoubtedly constitutes the most impressive spectacle. However, this also means that once Tian's body loses its function as spectacle, Tian might lose the meaning of his existence. Tian is not a hero whose growth might be achieved at the price of physical suffering, like the hero in Chang Che's *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967). It might be more reasonable to comprehend Tian's loss of a limb as directly leading to the invalidation of his function as a crucial spectacle, instead of simply

causing a lapse of his fighting capacity. Such an interpretation may help to understand the sudden loss of Tian's fighting strength.

Evidently, the eunuch image was treated as a masculine spectacle in the film *Shaolin Traitorous*. This is not the only case. A similar situation could also be found in *Ninja Wolves*. Moreover, in the latter film, the chief eunuch's naked and muscular upper body is clearly emphasised and can be directly observed in the film poster. (Fig 3.28) The eunuch Ma also adopts masculine tiger-like pose.

The eunuch's naked upper body is extensively exhibited twice in this film. In both scenes, eunuch Ma is practising his kung fu skills in his closed chamber. Also, in both scenes, the key female character Yuxian (羽仙), the concubine of Ma, comes secretly and sneaks a look at Ma but finally is detected by him. On the second occasion, Yuxian is accidentally killed by Ma, since he does not realise that she is the one who is peeping at him.

The eunuch Ma is not the only instance of the naked male body in the film; and Yuxian is not the only character who has the experience of peeping at a naked male body. However, what deserves extra attention is that the eunuch's body is exposed to and only to a woman in the film. It seems that the eunuch is in a passive being-gazed-at position in front of a woman when he is practising kung fu skills, so he is feminised by being a visual object. However, more exploration will show that such a sweeping verdict is a very hasty conclusion. The interpretation of the gaze relationship between Ma and Yuxian could be in a totally opposite direction.



Fig 3.32



Fig 3.33



Fig 3.34



Fig 3.35



Fig 3.36



Fig 3.37



Fig 3.38



Fig 3.39

Luo Chi does employ Yuxian's visual angle to present the movement of Ma's body; however, Yuxian's gazing is not given a careful description and Ma's figure, filmed from Yuxian's angle, is quite vague. (Fig 3.32 & 3.33) Moreover, Yuxian's gazing is not rooted in an erotic motive, but rather from an intention to spy on the tricks of Ma's moves. These factors would bother but might not prevent female audiences from gazing at Ma's masculine body from a heterosexual perspective. From a heterosexual viewpoint, the character Ma is apparently constructed as a sexual object. But the exposure of Ma's well-built body also suggests that Ma is portrayed rather as a man with expressive masculinity than as an emasculated eunuch. (Fig 3.34)

On the second occasion when Yuxian spies on Ma as he practises his moves, she is immediately detected and assaulted by him from the inside of the closed chamber.

Luo films this attack from the inner side of the chamber door. (Fig 3.35) Part of Ma's strong arm appears in a close-up shot. (Fig 3.36) Although this shot is filmed from a third person angle, fetishism of the arm is clearly displayed here, with the camera concentrating on Ma's firm arm when he attacks Yuxian who is standing outside the door. This indicates that Ma's masculine body forms a significant spectacle. The following shots depict Ma's cruel appearance and the face of Yuxian, dying from a hole pierced by Ma's hand. (Figs 3.37 & 3.38) After the door has opened, the bleeding body of Yuxian emerges. (Fig 3.39) This series of shots suggest that the eunuch's limb is quite hard and could not only punch through the door, but also penetrate the body of a woman.

On the whole, the eunuch Ma's masculine body, or in other words, Cheung Yick's hard body is an important spectacle of the film. Although a woman's gaze participates in the construction of the eunuch image, such a gaze is not truly encouraged by the director, and at last the woman pays for her gazing with her life. Her involvement in the film is thus a testimony of the eunuch's masculinity.

In general, eunuch images in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films in the late 1970s were masculinised in a more striking way. Eunuchs in *The Traitorous* and *The Wolf Boxer* are portrayed as hard-men, and are performed by a tough guy. These two films were not blockbusters, but their similarities in portraying the eunuchs reveal that this period was still a male-oriented period. Compared to the eunuch prototype created by King Hu, these eunuchs' body build and physical strength were given a noticeable emphasis and contribute to their most marked uniqueness. This transformation is in line with Desser's remarks on the attraction of masculine male stars. He claims that

the attraction to audiences is “less to do with political activism and more to do with sensory stimulation”.⁷³

3.7 Conclusion

In the turbulent sixties and booming seventies, eunuchs as chief villains with excellent martial arts skills and high political positions appeared in Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre and gradually became stereotyped. During these two decades, eunuchs were typically characterised in a masculine way. Facing the invasions of the colonial and Communist ideologies, King Hu implemented the traditional Chinese ideology which was founded on the dualistic hierarchical power system in the construction of his eunuch character in the 1976 film. His masculinising the eunuch Cao serves the re-establishment of the traditional values and social rules. Unlike Hu, Yen Jung Tsu, in the early 1970s, masculinises the eunuch Gui as a capable villain for the purpose of highlighting the individual value. Sung Ting-mei and Luo Chi were both influenced by Hong Kong's kung fu craze and extended the masculine vogue in their construction of eunuch characters in the late 1970s. Notwithstanding that the depictions of these characters were accompanied by different motivations of different directors, the acceptance of the masculine power structure could commonly be revealed from these images.

⁷³ Desser, “Making Movies Male”, 25.

Chapter 4: Looking Like Women

Eunuch Images in the Golden Age of Hong Kong Film

4.1 Introduction

Following the last chapter's examination of the prototype screen image of the eunuch and its subsequent development in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films made in the 1960s and 1970s, this chapter will focus on eunuch characters, in the same genre, constructed in the 1980s and 1990s. As seen in Chapter Three, eunuch characters in the previous films were masculinised in every respect, and masculine power occupied a dominant position in the mass aesthetic of Hong Kong popular culture. In the next two decades, most eunuchs were still portrayed as chief villains with superhuman martial arts skills and high political status; however, unlike their previous counterparts, these eunuchs were generally feminised in appearance. Does this change imply a rise in the value of femininity? In order to answer this question, this chapter will first investigate how these eunuchs are feminised. This involves not only how eunuchs' physical traits are portrayed, but also how their power is depicted. Further studies will show that even though their political status and martial arts skills are still matchless, their privileged gaze is no longer secure. This implies that compared with their earlier counterparts, directors in this period may have a different attitude towards those figures who hold authority.

Crucial to how directors construct the symbol of authority figure is their perception of power in reality. For Hong Kong people of Chinese origin, the 1980s

and 1990s might not have been easier than the previous period. In 1984, the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed.¹ According to this agreement, the sovereignty of Hong Kong would be passed from Britain to China in 1997.² Thus, 1997 became the moment of Hong Kong's reunification with China and liberation from Britain's colonisation. Dick Wilson, who lived and worked in Hong Kong in 1960s and also devoted great attention in Chinese political figures of Mao's era, discusses the Hong Kong identity between the traditional Chinese ideology and the modern Western values in his monograph on the issues of Hong Kong. He stresses that Hong Kong people, rather than celebrating the coming national reunion, began in an increasing number to clarify their identity as "Hong Kongers", rather than Chinese or British.³ They understood that the handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty from Britain to China would be the best fate they could imagine, as a historian Frank Welsh introduces in his book on Hong Kong history.⁴ However, their anxiety gradually grew as they headed towards the unification. This is not hard to comprehend. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Cultural Revolution took place in Mainland China and swept away numerous Hong Kong people's pride in being Chinese. In 1989, Hong Kong people's confidence in the Chinese government was, again, driven away by the 1989 Tiananmen incident. The 1997 unification, thus, seemed to be a return of territory, rather than a restoration of local culture and identity.

¹ Full text of the document – Joint Declaration of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong ("Sino-British Joint Declaration" for short) – can be found as an appendix to *Political Change and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong* by Ian Scott (London: Hust & Company, 1989), 353 – 355.

² Ibid.

³ Dick Wilson, *Hong Kong! Hong Kong!* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 43 – 44.

⁴ Frank Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong* (London: HaperCollinsPublishers, 1997), 516.

Apart from these political reasons, Hong Kong's history itself may have formed another obstacle to the cultural restoration. In his book on the issue of Hong Kong's cultural and political space before 1997, Ackbar Abbas states it like this:

Ironically, it is Hong Kong's colonial history, the only history it has known and a history that cannot be forgotten overnight, that has distanced Hong Kong culturally and politically from China and that will make their relationship not simply one of reunification.⁵

Abbas' opinion is an overstatement. Hong Kong's colonial history is also a history of migration. From a small fishing village to a metropolis, the development of this place could not possibly rely only on the limited numbers of British migrants; large numbers of people from other Asian countries, especially from mainland China, not only contributed indispensable labour resources, but also brought valuable cultural assets. Hong Kong residents of Chinese origin always constituted a major part of the population, and the profound cultural connection between Hong Kong and Mainland China has never diminished. However, Abbas is to some extent right. It is the impurity embodied in language and ideology that distinguishes Hong Kong culture as neither an accessory to British culture nor a subsidiary of Chinese culture. In addition, with the passage of time, young people who were born in Hong Kong grew up and gradually became a major force in consumer culture since the 1970s. Unlike their parents who moved from Mainland China to Hong Kong and typically held an ideology of the greatness of China, the young generation did not have a strong sense of Chinese identity. Moreover, being educated in a westernised system, Hong Kong's new generation could hardly obtain the same ideology concerning the greatness of

⁵ Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong : Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 5.

China as their parents did. Hong Kong is the place where they were born; and their primary concern is the local people and local events. Correspondingly, David Bordwell notes that since the 1970s, Cantonese, the most popular local dialect, gradually regained its dominant position on the screen.⁶ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the first New Wave movement took place in Hong Kong's film industry, the directors, especially the young ones, paid great attention to the life of local people. Hong Kong cinema in this period was undergoing a process of localisation. In his work focusing particularly on Hong Kong's New Wave cinema, Pak Tong Cheuk points out that:

[A] local consciousness emerged in the 1960s, it was not until the 1970s, when television entirely adopted Cantonese as the medium of communication (in Chinese channels), and when the programmes were localized and the New Wave emerged, that the task of the localization of cinema was completed.⁷

Long before the territorial unification in 1997, the localisation of Hong Kong films had been completed. In the process of the localisation, most New Wave directors who had been trained overseas employed new techniques in their direction and cinematography. Accompanying the practice of new techniques in films was an openness to explore new ways of viewing the world and conveying what they wanted to say. Taking this into consideration, it is not difficult to imagine that the young directors who made their debut in this period would have a different understanding of power and a different approach in constructing the power icon – the eunuch.

⁶ David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 66 - 67.

⁷ Pak Tong Cheuk, *Hong Kong New Wave Cinema (1978 - 2000)* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2008), 14.

The new techniques introduced by the New Wave directors influenced not only the language of their films but also Hong Kong film industry as a whole. According to Bordwell, these techniques partly facilitated the generation of Hong Kong cinema's "golden age", which took shape in the mid-1980s.⁸ Around the same time, the second New Wave formed, and the focus of the films in this period further centred on Hong Kong people's feelings about the forthcoming unification. Apart from the technical advantages, during this period, there were lavish financial investments, as introduced by Zhao Weifang who systematically analyses the rheological history of Hong Kong film, coming in from Taiwan as well as other East and South-East Asian regions.⁹ Moreover, Hong Kong films captivated numerous loyal fans in and outside Hong Kong. In sum, Hong Kong film-makers in this period possessed advanced techniques, sufficient capital, enormous markets and excellent actors; and all these advantages worked together to create the brilliant period of Hong Kong film industry. However, what should not be ignored is that they simultaneously had another kind of motivation: a sense of crisis or anxiety about their future. Based on his studies of Hong Kong films during this "golden age", Bordwell notices that "[f]ilm workers hustled to make as much money as possible: who could say what opportunities would remain after 1997?"¹⁰

In the "golden age", especially in the early 1990s, a number of *wuxia* films with eunuchs as the key villains were made. For instance, there are *Swordsman* (笑傲江湖, 1990) by King Hu (胡金銓) and *Tsui Hark* (徐克), *New Dragon Gate Inn* (新龙门客

⁸ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 4. The period from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s is widely acknowledged as "the last golden age" of the Hong Kong film industry. See Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 72.

⁹ Weifang Zhao, *The Rheological History of Hong Kong's Film Industry* (香港电影产业流变) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2008), 85 – 86.

¹⁰ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 72.

栈, 1992) by Raymond Lee (李惠民) and Tsui Hark, *The Tai-Chi Master* (太极张三丰, 1993) by Yuen Woo-ping (袁和平), *The Heroic Trio* (东方三侠, 1993) by Johnnie To (杜琪峰), *Butterfly Sword* (新流星蝴蝶剑, 1993) by Michael Mak (麦当杰), *The Assassin* (刺客新传——杀人者唐斩) by Billy Chung Siu-Hung (钟少雄), *Flying Dagger* (神经刀与飞天猫, 1993), *Slave of Sword* (剑奴, 1993) by Chu Yen-ping (朱延平), and *The Kung Fu Scholar* (伦文叙老点柳先开/流氓状元, 1994) by Norman Law Man (罗文). Most eunuch characters in these films in the 1990s are feminised in appearance. This was not the first period when such a depiction occurred. Early in the 1984 film *Secret Service of the Imperial Court* (also named *Police Pool of Blood*, 锦衣卫, directed by Chin-Ku Lo and Produced by Shao Brothers Studio), the eunuch Wang Zhen (王振, played by Anthony Lau, 刘永) is endowed with typical female traits such as red lips, polished nails and a high pitched voice. (Figs 4.01 & 4.02) Exaggerated makeup and exotic costumes are also typical features of the eunuch characters in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, extreme low angle shots are generally used in the construction of eunuch characters, making them look distorted and overbearing. Among all the films produced in this period, three films – *New Dragon Gate Inn*, *The Heroic Trio* and *The Assassin* – portrayed eunuchs most deliberately and successfully. Three key eunuchs in these films will be the research objects of this chapter.



Fig 4.01



Fig 4.02

4.2 Film synopses

The Heroic Trio (东方三侠), a Hong Kong *wuxia* film, directed by Johnnie To (Du Qifeng, 杜琪峰), was co-produced by China Entertainment Films Production and Paka Hill Film Production Co. in 1993. This film characterises three heroines with different personalities and depicts how they discard antagonistic relationships and join together to defeat the villain – an undead eunuch with superb martial arts skills. A quirky baby-kidnapping case raises the curtain of this film. The burglar is woman named Xinjing (心靖, also named Chen San/Qingqing, 陈三/青青, and is played by Michelle Yeoh, 杨紫琼) who always wears an invisibility cloak when she kidnaps new born babies for the eunuch Chen Gonggong (陈公公, played by Ren Shiguan, 任世官), who wants to raise one of these babies to be the emperor of China. In one of her missions, Xinjing is injured by Dongdong (东东, played by Anita Mui, 梅艳芳), who was a close friend of Xinjing when they were young. Both of them have the experience of being adopted and taught by a martial arts master who guides them to become swordswomen fighting for righteousness and justice. Dongdong grows to be an excellent swordswoman and marries a policeman, but she hides her swordswoman

identity from her husband. Unlike Dongdong, Xinjing has been abducted by Chen who erases her memory and trains her to be a cold-blooded assassin. When Chen focuses on training Xinjing, another girl, Chen Qi (陈七, played by Maggie Cheung, 张曼玉), seizes the opportunity to escape from the eunuch Chen and lives an independent life free of Chen's control for ten years before she takes the baby-kidnapping case. Apparently, she is fighting for money, but in fact she fights for righteousness. The unexpected meetings of these three women trigger their lost memories and accomplish their mission to rescue all babies and defeat the eunuch.

The Assassin (刺客新传 —— 杀人者唐斩), a 1993 Hong Kong film, was directed by Billy Chung Siu-Hung (钟少雄) and produced by Prosper Film Production Ltd. It is an adaption from the novel *The Assassin* (《杀人者唐斩》) written by the famous *wuxia* novelist Wen Rui'an (温瑞安, 1954 —). The film depicts the life of the assassin Tang Zhan (唐斩, played by Zhang Fengyi, 张丰毅), from his selection by the eunuch Wei Zhongxian (魏忠贤, played by Ni Dahong, 倪大红/倪大红) for his assassination missions until his final battle to kill Wei to put an end to his brutal life. Before being selected by Wei, Tang has been condemned to death for his elopement with Lu Yao (路遥, played by Rosamund Kwan Chi-lam, 关之琳). In prison, his eyes are sewn and his body is terribly tortured. Moreover, what awaits him is not the death penalty but a battle arranged by Wei with another seven ferocious prisoners who have been sentenced to death. After Tang wins this battle, Wei changes Tang's first name from Baojia (保家), which means defending the homeland, to Zhan (斩), literally referring to beheading, and also implying the abandonment of his past identity. Thereafter, Tang becomes Wei's assistant, whose

prime mission is to eradicate Wei's political opponents. Several years later, Tang's memory of his original identity is recalled after he encounters Lu on his Lantern Mission. After that, Tang wants to resign from Wei's assassin group, escapes to Lu's village and is quickly accepted by the villagers. Shortly afterwards, Tang's harmonious life is disrupted by another subordinate of Wei, Song Zhong (宋中, played by Zhang Guangbei, 张光北) who comes to arrest Tang on Wei's behalf. Tang defeats Song, but comes back to Wei. Then he gradually eradicates Wei's assistants, including Mi Gonggong (米公公, played by Song Ge, 宋戈), the head of Wei's political opponents, who disguises himself as Wei's follower, and Wang Kou (王寇, played by Max Mok Siu-Chung, 莫少聪), who is supposed to be Tang's friend. Finally, Tang kills Wei in Wei's palace, and the film concludes with Tang's return to Lu's village.

New Dragon Gate Inn (新龙门客栈), also named *Dragon Inn* or *New Dragon Inn*, produced by Seasonal Film Corporation, is a Hong Kong *wuxia* film directed by Raymond Lee and produced by Tsui Hark in 1992. This work is widely acknowledged as the remake of King Hu's *Dragon Inn* (1967), whose main storyline is borrowed by the 1992 film. Set in the Ming Dynasty, the story begins by depicting the brutality of the barbaric secret police agency, the East Bureau, which is controlled by the chief eunuch Cao Shaoqin (曹少钦, played by Donnie Yen, 甄子丹). Cao callously frames and tortures the military general Yang Yuxuan to death. After that, Cao allows the escape of Yang's children by exiling them to the frontier in order to trap Yang's most capable assistant Zhou Huai'an (周淮安, played by Tony Leung Ka Fai, 梁家辉), who will be the saviour of the children. Protected by Zhou's lover Qiu Moyan (邱莫言, played by Brigitte Lin, 林青霞), Yang's children arrive at Dragon Gate/Long Men

(龙门), a place in the desert close to the border, and wait for Zhou in the Dragon Gate Inn, the only hostel in this area. In fact, it is a robber den owned by proprietress Jade King (Jin Xiang Yu 金镶玉, played by Maggie Cheung, 张曼玉), who is skilled in seducing men to murder them for money and use their meat to stuff buns. Moreover, the inn contains a secret passage leading to the border. Zhou asks Jade for access to the secret passage and wants to transfer Yang's children through this tunnel so as to escape from Cao's pursuit as soon as possible. However, Jade falls in love with Zhou and wants to keep him. At this point, Cao's men reach the inn. For the safety of the children, Zhou plans to use his wedding to Jade as camouflage for the escape of the children. However, this plan is finally detected by Cao's men, who immediately launch an attack to Zhou's group. The eunuch Cao arrives at night with more armed forces and besieges the inn. Toward the end of the film, although Jade eventually transfers Zhou's group through the secret passage, they are still caught out by Cao. After ferocious fighting, Jade's chef Diao Buyu (刁不遇) pares half of Cao's body back to the bones, creating a chance for Zhou to kill Cao.

4.3 Feminising eunuchs

This section mainly focuses on how eunuch characters created in the 1980s and 1990s are feminised in Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre. Such feminisation will be found not only visible in eunuchs' appearance, but also evident in their relationship with their subordinates, in which even though these eunuchs are endowed with the privilege of a gazer, they do not have the actual looking power. The following analyses involve three scenes, which are respectively drawn from the three target

films, presenting three chief eunuchs' first appearance. Besides, this section also includes investigations of the similarity and cinematographic difference between the construction of eunuchs in this period and that in the 1960s and 1970s. These investigations will help explore the transformation of the cultural representation of Hong Kong identity which will be examined in the next section.

4.3.1 Who shall I look at? The “action babe heroine” or the eunuch?¹¹



Fig 4.03

The 1993 film *The Heroic Trio* is identified as “one of the most memorable, and influential, female-gender action movies in the Hong Kong cinema” by Stephen Teo.¹² The three heroines, played by the famous Hong Kong actresses Anita Mui,

¹¹ The term “action babe heroine” is quoted from the article “Beauty in motion: Gender, spectacle and action babe cinema” which focuses on the sexy women with excellent fighting skills in typically successful commercials. See Marc O’Day, “Beauty in motion: Gender, spectacle and action babe cinema”, *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (New York: Routledge, 2004), 205.

¹² Stephen Teo, *Director in Action: Johnnie To and the Hong Kong Action Film* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 52.

Michelle Yeoh and Maggie Cheung, contribute the essential appeal of the film. According to Teo, the world-wide popularity of this film could not have been achieved without the global influence of these three actresses.¹³ The women, dressed sexily and fighting bravely, have a special name – “action babe heroines” – as introduced by Marc O’Day in his studies of fighting women.¹⁴ Leon Hunt also investigates fighting beauties in his work. He starts his discussion on this topic by citing Jonathan Ross’s comments on the images of Chinese action ladies as this: “The whole idea of sexy Chinese girls wearing tight superhero-type costumes, fighting and then having sex, is possibly the finest development in the hundred years of cinema history a man could possibly hope for.”¹⁵ As shown in the above figure, which is a poster of *The Heroic Trio*, three heroines could be viewed as typical action babies who are ideal visual objects of the public. (Fig 4.03)

Although the leading roles of this film are women whose appearance constitutes the main appeal of this film, it can hardly be asserted that the masculine vogue shaped in the 1960s and 1970s was replaced by a pursuit of feminine value in the 1990s. Taking *The Heroic Trio* as an example, both soft and tough characteristics are combined in the images of the three heroines. Among these three beautiful and sexual women, Qingqing is a virtuous wife and Xinjing falls in love with the man controlled by her master the eunuch Chen. Typical feminine traits are clearly embodied in these images. However, at the same time, they are also masculinised to be warriors with

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ O’Day, “Beauty in motion”, 205.

¹⁵ Leon Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Tiger* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 117. Jonathan Ross, who is an English television and radio presenter, a film critic and a cult film geek, makes the comment on the images of Chinese action women in the foreword to the book *The Essential Guide to Deadly China Dolls*. See, Rick Baker and Toby Russell, *The Essential Guide to Deadly China Dolls* (London: Eastern Heroes Publications, 1996), 1-22.

high martial arts skills who shoulder the responsibility to save the homeland. By comparison, male images in this film are generally emasculated for their incompetence in guarding the homeland and can only pin their hope on the heroines. In spite of men's incompetence, this is still a story in which masculine power is highly valued, since the world is eventually saved by the masculinised female warriors. Moreover, when he directed this film, To attached extra attention to these heroines, not only by inviting the acclaimed action choreographer Tony Ching Siu-tung to direct the action sequences, but also by editing these sequences in person.¹⁶ In other words, it is not simply their sexy traits, but at a more important level their action that make these girls attractive “babe heroines”.

It is in this story, in which women are masculinised and men emasculated, that the image of the eunuch Chen, as a powerful villain, emerges. He is greedy in political power and makes a crazy attempt to restore the feudal monarchy. In his cavernous underground palace, he trains his own army and intends to crown an emperor for modern China. Besides, he possesses superb martial arts skills, like his counterparts in the previous *wuxia* films. It is not an exaggeration to say that, in this film, a eunuch with great capability could be viewed as a character who is masculinised at a higher level than any other male.



Fig 4.04



Fig 4.05

¹⁶ Teo, *Director in Action*, 52.

However, Chen is, at the same time, feminised in several aspects. In the film, Chen wears heavy make-up on his face and delicate artificial nails on his fingers, and has a high pitched voice. (Figs 4.04 & 4.05) As well as being feminised in appearance, Chen is also feminised in the gaze relationship between him and his subordinate, Xinjing. Almost every time when they meet in Chen's underground palace, Chen stays at the top end of a long staircase, while Xinjing stands at the foot of the stairs. (Fig 4.07) This spatial disparity provides Chen with a good angle to observe Xinjing. However, further investigation will show that, it is Chen rather than Xinjing who is portrayed as the object of their gaze relationship.



Fig 4.06



Fig 4.07



Fig 4.08



Fig 4.09



Fig 4.10



Fig 4.11



Fig 4.12



Fig 4.13



Fig 4.14



Fig 4.15



Fig 4.16



Fig 4.17

The above figures, which are drawn from the early part of *The Heroic Trio*, depict the scene of Xinjing and Chen's meeting in which Chen appears for the first time in this film. Instead of kneeling down at the feet of Chen, Xinjing keeps looking up and staring at Chen throughout the scene. In the shot/reverse shot edit, a series of medium shots of Xinjing clearly present her gaze at Chen. (Figs 4.10, 4.12, 4.14 and 4.16) Accompanying these shots, Chen is repeatedly portrayed as lying on his couch with his eyes half closed. (Figs 4.08, 4.13, 4.15 and 4.17) He even does not turn his face to Xinjing. These all suggest that To is trying to avoid exhibiting Chen's visual power. In addition, To shows an inclination to construct Chen's image from Xinjing's viewing angle. Most times the camera cuts to Chen, it adopts the low angle of

Xinjing's viewpoint. (Figs 4.09, 4.11, 4.13 and 4.15) By this means, To shows a different attitude towards the construction of the classical image of the eunuch, who was previously portrayed as a dominant gazer in the cinematography of the 1960s and 1970s, unlike directors who would like to adopt their point of view.

Moreover, every time the camera cuts to Chen, the take of Chen is longer than that of Xinjing. This further indicates that, in this scene, it is the eunuch rather than Xinjing who is portrayed as the main visual object. On the last occasion when Chen is in focus, the take even lasts for over 15 seconds. (Fig 4.17) Before that, the take of Xinjing only lasts for 4 seconds. (Fig 4.16) According to Bordwell, the average length of one take in Hong Kong films made in the early 1990s is only 4 – 6 seconds.¹⁷ The short takes of Xinjing's unchanging posture and facial expression confirm her role as a gazer, rather than displaying her as an appealing visual object. Even though her sexy curves could be observed in the medium full shot shown in Fig 4.16, 4 seconds duration might not be enough for audiences to take in Xinjing's image thoroughly. In addition, the cold colour of Xinjing's tight clothes does not help to highlight her body shape against the dark background. Interestingly, what deserves extra attention is that, unlike Xinjing's image in the cold light, Chen's image in the warm golden light is particularly eye-catching. Later on in the following sections, the contrasting lighting of these two characters will be further analysed with the purpose of finding out why the villain looks bright while the heroine looks gloomy. But before that, it is necessary to find out why the director tends to construct Xinjing, who is reckoned as one of the "action babe heroines", as the gazer, and portrays the eunuch as the visual object of his subordinate.

¹⁷ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 163.

4.3.2 From invisible wirepuller to visual object

The 1993 film *The Assassin* is less well-known than *The Heroic Trio*; however, it deserves equal attention in regard to the construction of the eunuch image, which is a very important visual aspect of this film. This film is mainly adapted from a novel with the same name *The Assassin*, written by a famous Chinese *wuxia* novelist Wen Rui'an.¹⁸ Apart from the adjustment of the storyline, the biggest change from the novel to the film lies in the portrayal of the chief eunuch Wei Zhongxian. In the novel, the appearance of Wei is not directly described. Rather, he is characterised as manipulating behind the scenes. Moreover, he is not the most important antagonist of the protagonist Tang Zhan. In the film, however, Wei is not an invisible character any more, but appears directly on the screen as the chief villain. These adaptations imply that making Wei's presence visible in the film is not simply about meeting the requirements of transferring a literary text to a visual one. Billy Chung inherits the classical model of portraying eunuchs in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films, and Wei is also characterised as a tyrannical ruler with superb martial arts. Chung's approach to construct the eunuch Wei reveals that, instead of being faithful to the original work, Chung cares more about film audiences' understanding and reception of the eunuch image.

¹⁸ Apart from the novella *Sharen Zhe Tang Zhan*, some plots of the film *The Assassin* are also adapted from Wen's another work *Jianghu Xianhua* (江湖闲话), especially from the chapter named "Cike Tang Zhan" (刺客唐斩), which was written in 1988.



Fig 4.18



Fig 4.19



Fig 4.20

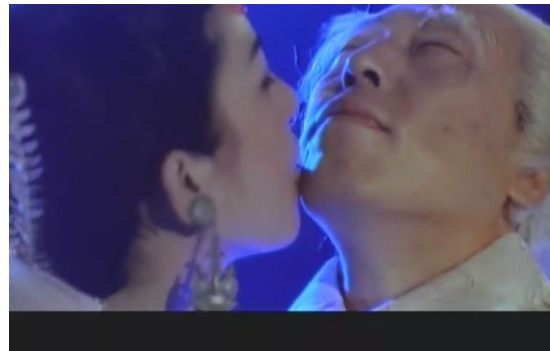


Fig 4.21

However, even though Chung employs the classical model of constructing the chief eunuch, Wei is not the same as his previous counterparts. Unlike the eunuch characters, who were masculinised in every way in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films in the 1960s and 1970s, Wei is feminised in a number of aspects. For instance, he does not look like a tough man like the eunuchs created in the 1970s. In contrast, he is portrayed as a man who has pale cheeks and wears delicate artificial nails. (Figs 4.18 & 4.19) Besides, in the previous *wuxia* films, eunuchs as chief villains are usually first seen as leaders of an army or political clan. However, in *The Assassin*, Wei is flirting with women when he is first shown. (Fig 4.20 & 4.21) Wei's flirting with women, in a Chinese traditional context, does not stress his masculinity, since in traditional Chinese ideology, ideal manhood is not embodied in a sexual relationship with women, but rather reflected in political achievements and social status.

When Tang Zhan, as a prisoner, is brought and introduced to Wei, Wei is still flirting with the women. Without kneeling down to Wei, Tang walks towards him and looks straight at him. Instead of being led by another official, Tang takes the lead when he walks towards Wei. (Fig 4.22) No one stands between Wei and Tang. This makes Tang an ideal visual object, one whose image is completely exposed to Wei, and also provides him with an ideal position to observe Wei. After the full shot of Tang comes a close-up of Wei's face. (Fig 4.23) Wei is lying on his couch, surrounded by the women and turning his face to observe Tang. Then, Tang's image reappears in a medium shot in which he is still staring at Wei. (Fig 4.24) It is hard to discern who the dominant gazer is. They look directly at each other and the shot/reverse shot strategy is repeatedly applied to contrast their appearance all through this scene. However, a difference still exists between the portrayal of Wei and that of Tang. After Tang is introduced to Wei in his palace, he hardly moves his position and his eyes. Every time the camera is cut to Tang, he maintains the same posture, staring at Wei straightforwardly. (Figs 4.24, 4.27 and 4.28) Unlike Tang, who barely moves, Wei, in this scene, adjusts his posture from lying down to sitting, and then to standing up. Moreover, Wei's whole body is, for the first time in the film, completely revealed in three dimensions when he stands up and talks to Tang. (Figs 4.29, 4.30 and 4.31) The director adopted a 20-second take to portray Wei, who slowly turns his body; and all parts of his body, including his striking hairstyle, are thoroughly exhibited on the screen. From a comparison of Tang and Wei's movements in the shot/reverse shot edit, it is not hard to see that Tang behaves closer to a stationary gazer whose mission is to record every movement of Wei; although Wei plays the role of a ruler and tries to subordinate Tang in this meeting, he is the more eye-catching for his unusual costume and hairstyle, which are fully presented.



Fig 4.22



Fig 4.23



Fig 4.24

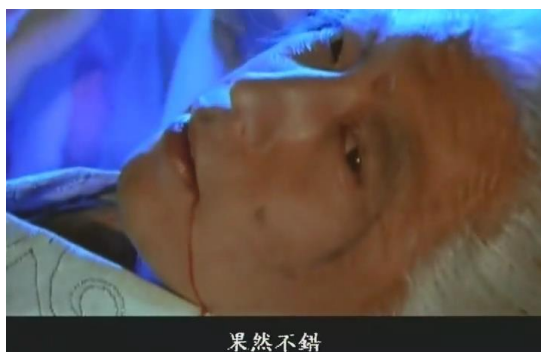


Fig 4.25



Fig 4.26



Fig 4.27



Fig 4.28



Fig 4.29



Fig 4.30



Fig 4.31

The above interpretation about Tang and Wei's gazing and being gazed at relationship could further be supported by the narrative strategy in this film. This is because the incidents from the very beginning of the film to the end of this scene are actually belong to a flashback in which Tang recalls his transition from an ordinary person to an assassin. Specifically, in the shot after the 20-second take of Wei's figure, Tang's image appears again; however, this time the image is shown as gradually going out of focus. (Figs 4.32 & 4.33) Then a dissolve leads to a close-up shot of Tang's face. When Tang's face is re-focused again, the mise-en-scene is entirely changed. (Fig 4.34 & 4.35) Tang is standing in a mass grave rather than Wei's palace. (Fig 4.36) This is almost the same shot of the mass grave from the same angle as the one that first appears in the very beginning of this film, when Tang starts to tell of how he has become an assassin. (Fig 4.37) This repetition reminds audiences that everything they have seen derives from Tang's memory. This also means that Wei's appearance and his every move so far exhibited on the screen could be viewed as conceived by Tang. It is from Tang's viewpoint, or in other words, through Tang's eyes, that Wei is visualised.



Fig 4.32



Fig 4.33



Fig 4.34



Fig 4.35



Fig 4.36



Fig 4.37

4.3.3 The disappearance of a eunuch's angle of view

Being a remake of King Hu's *Dragon Inn*, Raymond Lee and Tsui Hark's *New Dragon Gate Inn* has long been recognised as a milestone in the history of *wuxia* film.¹⁹ When the “golden age” of Hong Kong film industry came to the end in the early 1990s, the success of this film promoted the development of co-productions which have eventually been proved to be an important component of Hong Kong film

¹⁹ Zhao, *The Rheological History of Hong Kong's Film Industry*, 195-197.

in the new century.²⁰ There is almost no negative criticism of this film that can be found in papers or on the internet. The praise it has received comes not only from professional film critics, but also from ordinary movie-goers.²¹ As a consequence of its success, this 1992 film was digitally remastered 20 years later, and the new version, released in the spring of 2012, also won numerous plaudits. Before the release of the 1992 *New Dragon Gate Inn*, the eunuch as chief villain with superb martial arts skills and considerable political power had long been stereotyped, and a number of eunuch characters following this model had been constructed from 1967 to the early 1990s. However, it was from the 1992 *New Dragon Gate Inn*, that the stereotypical eunuch of Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre became well-known. It is not an exaggeration to say that, nowadays, most people's awareness of the eunuch stereotype in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films starts from their encounter of the eunuch Cao Shaoqin in this film.



Fig 4.38



Fig 4.39

²⁰ Ibid. 196-197.

²¹ For instance, *New Dragon Gate Inn* is identified as a perfect *wuxia* film in an online film review posted on Douban, which is a very important Chinese SNS website providing ratings and reviews of not only films, but also books and music. See Xizhengke, "New Dragon Gate Inn: The Perfect Wuxia Classic", *movie.douban.com*. 16 December. 2011, accessed 1 May. 2016. <https://movie.douban.com/review/5215381/> Similar comments on *New Dragon Gate Inn* can also be found on many websites.

Unlike the first appearance of Chen in *The Heroic Trio* or Wei in *The Assassin*, Cao in *New Dragon Gate Inn* is not initially seen as living in a cavernous palace or lying on a couch. Instead, he appears as a commander who is training his powerful and cruel army. What Cao does at the beginning of the film substantially contributes to his masculinity. However, at the same time, Cao, Chen and Wei are the similar in that all of them are feminised in appearance. Cao's feminine manner can be clearly observed from the way he holds a handkerchief and wipes his perspiration. (Figs 4.38 & 4.39) Moreover, the heavy makeup and feminine voice also highlight the feminisation of Cao.

As well as his striking appearance, employing a real kung fu master to act Cao's part further underlines his significance in contributing to the spectacular quality of the film. On the whole, this film is successful not only for its compelling story, but also for its superior cast and magnificent landscapes, which were scarcely seen in previous Hong Kong films. This film marks a successfully long-sighted trial of filming in Mainland China. The desert scene filmed in the northwest of Mainland China offers Hong Kong audiences a splendid spectacle that could hardly be produced in Hong Kong's studio. The cast, consisting of popular stars Brigitte Lin, Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung, who are the portrayers of the main virtuous characters, also guarantees the appeal of this film. Before the release of the 2012 *New Dragon Gate Inn*, the producer Ng See Yuen recalls his memory in an interview and stresses that, the glamour of the three hero portrayers would easily eclipse the image of the chief villain.²² Therefore, it was hard to find an actor who could properly interpret the

²² Before the remastered version of *New Dragon Gate Inn* was released, the producer Ng See Yuen attended its preview for journalists in Beijing and uncovered a number of titbits about this film. This film evoked audiences' memories of Hong Kong's *wuxia* films in the golden age, and it was given a score of 85 (of 100 as the full mark) by the preview group. More details about Ng's introduction to

villain's distinct quality. Donnie Yen, Cao's portrayer, is not the most handsome or remarkable actor in Hong Kong; however, his real kung fu skills make his fighting powerful and authentic and contribute a different type of spectacle from that of the three stars.

As mentioned above, Cao in *New Dragon Gate Inn* is first seen as the leader of an army and this is quite different from what eunuchs Chen and Wei do when they first appear. A further difference lies in the fact that the first appearance of the eunuch Cao is not presented from the point of view of a particular character who is analogous to Xinjing or Tang, from whose viewing angle Wei and Chen are first shown in the other two films. Generally speaking, the manner of portraying Cao at the beginning of the 1992 film follows King Hu's approach to create Cao in his 1967 film. Like Hu, Lee also introduces Cao's characteristics in the title sequence by adopting a voice-over which does not belong to any character in the film. Also in the title sequence, eunuch Cao is shown as an executioner, who is framing and torturing his political opponent General Yang to death. The whole title sequence of the 1992 film is like a remake of its counterpart in the 1967 *Dragon Inn*.

However, *New Dragon Gate Inn* is a work of the 1990s, and has the characteristics of these times. Moreover, although eunuch Cao looks quite different from eunuchs Wei and Chen, these three eunuchs still share common attributes peculiar to the 1990s. As previously stated, all of them are feminised in appearance, and this is the most obvious difference from their counterparts created in the 1960s and 1970s. As important spectacular figures, eunuchs Chen and Wei are further presented as the visual objects of their subordinates. Even though Lee does not sculpt

this film could be found in the report of the preview posted on the website of *1905.com*. 19 February. 2012, accessed 1 May. 2016. <http://www.1905.com/special/s2012/gvjd/072/index.html>

Cao's image by applying the point of view of any particular character, he retains from depicting Cao as the subject of any gaze relations, nor does he employ Cao's viewing angle to depict other characters. At the beginning of *New Dragon Gate Inn*, Cao's political power is fully demonstrated through his abuse of the authority on the execution ground. Here Cao is depicted as sitting on a high platform alone, and this position gives him the privilege of observing everyone. (Fig 4.38) This would be an ideal angle from which to get a wide shot of the whole execution ground if Cao's point of view could be taken. However, no shot in this scene indicates that Cao's viewing point is employed and this marks a big difference in eunuch construction between the 1960s to the 1990s. As examined in Chapter Three, in the 1967 *Dragon Inn*, at the beginning of the film, Hu chooses to stand by the side of Cao and depicts the children in exile in a long shot filmed from a high angle. By doing so, Hu's acceptance of the traditional power order is outlined. In the 1971 *The Eunuch*, the point of view of the chief eunuch Gui is repeatedly employed in the portrayal of the power relations between the powerful eunuch and other characters. However, in the title sequence of *New Dragon Gate Inn*, the remake of the 1967 *Dragon Inn*, Lee's choice not to employ the powerful eunuch's point of view as before indicates that Lee adopts a different attitude towards the construction of the hierarchical power structure. On this point, Lee holds a similar opinion to To and Chung, directors of *The Heroic Trio* and *The Assassin*, since neither of them chooses to characterise the chief eunuchs as subjects of the gaze, nor do they employ the eunuchs' viewpoint to develop their narratives. Besides, Lee frequently employs the low angle shot to depict Cao, and this approach is intensively used in the scene when Cao abuses his power on the execution field. Almost all the shots of him are filmed from a low angle. (Figs 4.40, 4.41, 4.42 and 4.43) This implies that Lee prefers to look at Cao from a place of the inferior.

Such an approach to characterising the eunuch is also in line with that of To and Chung who directly employ the point of view of the characters who are politically inferior to the eunuchs. All these phenomena suggest that a disparate attitude towards the power structure as presented in previous films commonly informs the portrayal of the powerful eunuch characters in the early 1990s.



Fig 4.40



Fig 4.41



Fig 4.42



Fig 4.43

4.4 Identifying with the inferior

Why are the eunuchs in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films made in the 1990s uniformly feminised? Why are they likely to be portrayed as objects rather than subjects in the gaze relationship with their subordinates? Why did the directors no longer identify with a powerful persona or employ the point of view of the chief eunuchs to facilitate the story-telling, as their predecessors had done in the previous period? To answer the

above questions, one should reconsider the issues facing the directors and consequently what kind of camera angle they were inclined to adopt.

As previously stated, both To and Chung tend to portray the chief eunuchs by employing the point of view of the eunuchs' subordinates. In *The Assassin*, eunuch Wei is first visualised in Tang's memory; in *The Heroic Trio*, eunuch Chen first appears after Xinjing has entered his palace. These directors, in the 1990s, showed a clear intention to adopt the viewing angle of one who has an inferior status in the portrayal of the powerful eunuch. Although Lee does not directly employ the point of view of a character with lower political rank, the low angle shot, typically applied in constructing the eunuch Cao, reveals that he chooses to portray the chief eunuch from below. In other words, Lee chooses to depict the powerful eunuch from an inferior position. Besides, looking at the chief eunuch from low angle shots not only occurs in *New Dragon Gate Inn*, but also in the other two films, and this is especially obvious in *The Heroic Trio*. When Xinjing enters Chen's palace, she always stands at the bottom of the steep stairway which leads up to Chen's throne. Such disparity in the spatial relationship between these two characters is underlined by the low angle shots of the eunuch Chen from Xinjing's viewpoint.

Apart from the difference in the subject of the gaze, which was changed from the powerful eunuchs to their subordinates, the way of addressing the point of view shot from the previous period to the "golden age" is also different. In the 1960s and 1970s, when directors intended to take the eunuch's visual standpoint, such an intention was mostly presented by the over-the-shoulder shot, or the third person shot, in which the eunuch's head or back is also framed in the shot. This type of shot is different from a strict or straightforward point of view shot which exhibits purely what the eunuch can

see without framing any parts of his body. As analysed in the last chapter, in the 1960s and 1970s, although the directors showed a positive attitude towards the hierarchical power structure and a clear intention to identify with powerful persona, they still did not want to identify with the eunuchs. In comparison, in *The Heroic Trio* and *The Assassin* both made in the 1993, the viewpoint shots of the powerful eunuchs from Xinjing and Tang's angle are, in most cases, strict point of view shots, rather than over-the-shoulder shots. The change from the over-the-shoulder shots from eunuchs' angle to the strict point of view shots from the angle of the inferior indicates that, in the previous period, directors were like bystanders in the construction of power structure; however, in the latter period, the directors put themselves into the position of the inferior, rather than that of a bystander. They not only identify with, but also invest deep sympathy in the inferior.

4.4.1 A forced leave and “a forced return”²³

How could this change happen? What made a director in the 1980s and 1990s abandon his position as outsiders, and choose rather to stand inside the power structure, but as one who occupies a low status? Did Hong Kong people in this period tend to identify with the inferior, the subordinate or the disempowered? Given close investigation of Hong Kong's history, the answer to the last question is: yes. Generally speaking, recognition of their powerlessness in obtaining the right to determine their own fate fosters the identification of Hong Kong people with the inferior. In the history of Hong Kong, for a long time until the second half of the twentieth century, Hong Kong had not received enough attention from either its

²³ The expression “a forced return” is quoted from Rey Chow who uses this term to describe the local people's feeling about Hong Kong's return to China. This point will be illustrated later in this section. See Rey Chow, “Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s”, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory—Culture—Ethnicity—Reading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 151.

original mother country, the imperial China, governed by the Qing government (1644 - 1912), or its colonial master. In his historical study of Hong Kong society, Welsh notices that the Qing government did not show much grief for losing this territory in the nineteenth century.²⁴ Besides, by quoting the words of Lord Palmerston, the then British Foreign Secretary, who described this place as “a barren island”, Welsh reveals that the occupation of Hong Kong Island in 1842 did not please the British governor very much.²⁵ Hong Kong Island was just a trivial bargaining chip which could be used arbitrarily in the interests of the two parent countries. One and a half centuries later, the governments of the two parent countries had the Sino-British Joint Declaration signed in 1984 and Hong Kong’s handover from Britain to China was finalised. During the negotiations for the agreement, only the British and Chinese governments were represented, just as had happened one and half centuries previously. No representative of the local government of Hong Kong was authorised to contribute to any decision.²⁶

After the 1966 and 1967 riots, as previously mentioned in the last chapter, the colonial governors did attach more attention to Hong Kong’s civil service. Especially during the ten years from 1972 to 1982 when Cranford Murray MacLehose was appointed as the 25th Governor of Hong Kong, Hong Kong’s economic performance and living condition experienced an impressive improvement. Ian Scott, who devoted great efforts to studies of Hong Kong’s political changes, makes a comment on the work of Hong Kong government during these ten years as below.

²⁴ Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 1-2.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 511.

Government remained paternalistic, occasionally authoritarian and still somewhat remote from the population, but its change of attitude towards public consultation and promised social policy improvements inspired confidence for the future and bestowed new legitimacy upon it.²⁷

According to Welsh's study of Hong Kong history, a survey early in 1982 showed that 85 per cent of its population had already become accustomed to the British administration.²⁸ Only 4 per cent of the people aspired for Hong Kong to return to China.²⁹ However, this fact did not impair Hong Kong people's acceptance of the outcome of the negotiations, which led to the coming reunification with China. When they were asked about their opinion of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, "the most reliable poll, carried out in October, indicated that, out of a random sample of 6,124 people, 79 per cent of those answering agreed that sovereignty should be returned to China, and 77 per cent believed the agreement to be the best obtainable under the circumstances ...". As shown in the poll, although Hong Kong people did not show a great passion in welcoming China's take-over, there was at least no clear panic over Hong Kong's future. However, 1989, when the event in Tiananmen Square happened, the semblance of calm was shattered. The 1989 event shook Hong Kong people's confidence in the Chinese government terribly. In the words of Dick Wilson, "[t]he students who were killed there [on the Tiananmen square] in 1989 carried to their graves the early hopes of 6 million Hongkongers to have a rational and civilised role in modernising China".³⁰ Returning Hong Kong's sovereignty to China in the near future, as a pre-destined fate, immediately aroused great panic in Hong Kong society.

²⁷ Scott, *Political Change and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong*, 127.

²⁸ Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 509.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Wilson, *Hong Kong!* 53.

Hong Kong people began to rethink Hong Kong's fate and their future, and the number of the people who chose to leave Hong Kong sharply increased in the early 1990s.³¹

“[A] forced return (without the consent of the colony's residents) to a ‘mother country’” – this is the understanding of Hong Kong's reunification with China expressed by Rey Chow, a cultural critic who was born and raised in Hong Kong.³² In Chow's paper “Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s”, both Britain and China are regarded as colonisers.³³ Hong Kong's post-coloniality, as stressed by Chow, “expunges all illusions of the possibility of reclaiming a ‘native’ culture.”³⁴ Hong Kong's native character is by no means British, nor is it communist. Hong Kong culture not only inherits the spirit of traditional Chinese culture, but also develops with the pace of the western culture. Its native character typically lies in its impurity, in Chow's words, its “in-betweenness” and its “origins [which are] impure”.³⁵ This character can clearly be observed from the daily language which is “a combination of Cantonese, spoken English and written Chinese”.³⁶ A similar understanding of Hong Kong's reunification with China can also be found in the work *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, written by Abbas, who points out that “[w]hen sovereignty reverts to China, we may expect to find a situation that is quasi-colonial”.³⁷

³¹ Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 534.

³² Chow, “Between Colonizers”, 151.

³³ *Ibid.*, 149-167.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁷ Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, 5.

4.4.2 The rebellious consciousness of the inferior

By considering the relationship between Hong Kong, Britain and China from the point of view of Hong Kong's people, it becomes easier to understand why the Hong Kong directors in this period chose to take the inferior's position in their films. A strong feeling of powerlessness in making decisions for Hong Kong had gradually cultivated Hong Kong people's identification with the inferior, the subordinate and the disempowered. Meantime, the two powerful parent countries had inevitably played the role of authoritarian rulers.

However, identifying with the inferior does not equate with victimising the one in the inferior position; instead, directors in their films made in the 1980s and 1990s generally empower the characters in the subordinate position, such as Xinjing and Tang Zhan, by bestowing upon them the consciousness of rebellion. These subordinates are like the children who have been rescued or raised by the eunuchs who play the role of a father. For instance, Tang is originally a prisoner sentenced to death, but is later freed from punishment by the eunuch Wei to become Wei's most capable subordinate; Xinjing, kidnapped by the eunuch Chen when she is very young, is brought up and trained to be an assassin by Chen. Despite the noble motive of fighting for the homeland, which is why Tang and Xinjing to fight against the eunuchs, the conflicts between the eunuchs and their subordinates are like indoor conflicts between tyrannical parents and children in their rebellious years. In the films made in the previous period, the main conflicts are usually embodied as people's resistance to the wielders of power. Those whom the eunuchs finally fight with are either knight-errants or the offspring of their political opponents, rather than their own men. This suggests that, in the 1960s and 1970s, the traditional ideology and

patriotism were the things directors wanted to emphasis. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, what they strived for was an authorisation of a distinct identity, just as the young men in their rebellious age would always struggle to gain approval for their social roles.

As soon as Hong Kong people clearly recognised that it was vain to strive for a valid position in speaking for Hong Kong in a political discourse, they had no choice but to find other ways to give vent to this unmet desire. Abbas explains this issue as follows:

Historical imagination, the citizens' belief that they might have a hand in shaping their own history, [is] replaced by speculation on the property or stock markets, or by an obsession with fashion or consumerism. If you cannot choose your political leaders, you can at least choose your own clothes.³⁸

Hong Kong people's "obsession with fashion or consumerism", with choosing their "clothes" instead of their "political leaders" exposes, in a different form, their struggle to speak on behalf of Hong Kong.³⁹ Abbas' statement partly helps to understand the occurrence of Hong Kong's golden decade which came soon after the official agreement to revert Hong Kong's sovereignty to China. It was not simply that the advanced techniques, which were tried out in the first "new wave" in the early 1980s, facilitated the prosperity of Hong Kong film industry later on. The active local market was also an indispensable drive for the boom in Hong Kong's film-making. As Bordwell stresses at the beginning of his work *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*, "Hong Kong movies were made simply because

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, 5

millions of people wanted to watch them”.⁴⁰ It seems that it was in films, an illusory world, or a fabricated space, that Hong Kong people found something that particularly satisfied them. Moreover, this is something that belongs especially to Hong Kong films, since even “[g]lobal blockbusters often failed in Hong Kong”.⁴¹

In return, Hong Kong directors did their best to cater to the local mass consumers. In his analysis of the success of Hong Kong films in the local market, Bordwell quotes the words of historian Choi Po-king. “For the first time, ... the makers of cultural products for the local market were people with primary allegiance to Hong Kong itself.”⁴² Here, making films for the local audiences was typically embodied in approaches such as replacing Mandarin with Cantonese as the main film language and drawing on local images and stories in films. What accompanied these adaptations was a deep concern of the local identity. Bordwell noticed a series of adaptations in cultural productions made for Hong Kong audiences, and he analyses the reason as follows:

After 1984, discussions of local identity were intensified by the impending handover to China. The closer 1997 came, the more aggressively distinctive Hong Kong’s lifestyle seemed to become, as if to assert a cultural liberation from the Mainland even as economic and political ties were tightening.⁴³

In light of Bordwell’s argument, Hong Kong directors’ taking the viewpoint of the inferiors and empowering them with rebellious characteristics could, in these hectic

⁴⁰ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 32. For the original place of Choi Po-king’s words, see Choi Po-king, “From Dependence to Self-Sufficiency: Rise of the Indigenous Culture of Hong Kong”, *Asian Culture* 14 (April 1990), 114-117.

⁴³ Ibid.

days, be viewed as a highlighting the localised Hong Kong identity in cultural discourse. As briefly mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, such a localisation of Hong Kong identity is also stressed by Wilson.

A couple of years before the [Sino-British] agreement, over 60 per cent of Hong Kong residents said they were Chinese. Only one-third called themselves Hong Kongers, and a quarter admitted to roots in Britain. Afterwards, in 1988, almost 80 per cent agreed to having a strong sense of belonging to Hong Kong.⁴⁴

Both Bordwell and Wilson's words help explain why the directors, when they construct their powerful eunuch characters, would like to identify with the roles of low political status, focus on them their aspiration and endow them with a rebellious consciousness to fight against their masters' rule and claim their unique identity.

However, what should also be borne in mind is that the precondition for identifying with the inferior is the acceptance of the dualistic power construction between the superior and the inferior. In other words, the disparity and conflict between the superior and the inferior imply that the hierarchical power mechanism still plays a crucial role in structuring the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. Although the Hong Kongers could hardly be reconciled to the role of the powerless, they show little inclination to remove the dualistic mechanism from the culture representation of power structure, in which the chief eunuchs in films are still viewed, or expected, to be powerful, capable, and to some extent, brilliant. On the one hand, therefore, the power spectre is the cause of their panic; while on the other hand, power is possibly something they desire and the hierarchical power mechanism still profoundly influences their expectation of the construction of a power discourse. As

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Hong Kong!* 43-44.

will be shown in the next section, this complicated emotion projected oddly onto the construction of the powerful eunuchs, not only led to the portrayal of eunuchs as tyrannical rulers, but also, paradoxically, endowed these eunuchs with some admirable characteristics. This seemingly absurd combination can be observed in the portrayal of eunuchs in *The Heroic Trio*, *The Assassin* and *New Dragon Gate Inn*.

4.5 The powerful eunuchs with seemingly admirable characteristics

Based on the exploration of the Hong Kong identity in the 1980s and 1990s, this section will investigate the three scenes analysed before, and further examine the construction of the three eunuchs. As will be revealed, power could be something that may characterise a eunuch as a devil; however, it could also be the thing that may make him a bright idol. This can directly be observed from the image of the eunuch Chen Gonggong in *The Heroic Trio*.

4.5.1 Grey heroine and bright villain

Chen's image first appears in the gloomy underground palace at the moment when Xinjing arrives here. At first glance, Chen's body in the distance looks like a little golden glow, emerging in the centre of the predominant blue tone which permeates the whole screen. (Fig 4.06) After passing a new-born baby to a servant of Chen, Xinjing stands in the palace without being illuminated by any bright light, and her body is simply surrounded by cold blue air. (Fig 4.07) Moreover, the cold colour of her clothes further incorporates her image in the gloomy atmosphere. (Figs 4.10, 4.12, 4.14 and 4.16) In contrast, the eunuch Chen wears eye-catching headgear and white clothes of an ancient style, and is bathed in a warm golden light. (Figs 4.09,

4.13, 4.15 and 4.17) In short, Xinjing looks grey while her master Chen looks warmly bright. This is surprising because Xinjing is the heroine and is played by the well-known actress Michelle Yeoh who is an ideal visual object for the public.

According to Bordwell, audiences are sensitive even of tiny colour contrasts, and can quickly pick out a bright or warm colour from a dark or cold background.⁴⁵ The contrasting lighting employed in this scene helps substantially to attract the audiences' attention to the eunuch's appearance. As previously discussed, Hong Kong directors in this period tended to adopt the standpoint of the inferior, and made films in the way that local audiences expected to see them. Therefore, if employing Xinjing's point of view is in accordance with the Hong Kong identity, lighting up the image of the eunuch and objectifying him as an attractive sight for Xinjing is not against the expectations of local audiences. Furthermore, characterising the eunuch as a bright image partly exposes how the image of power or authority looked in the eyes of Hong Kong audiences in the early 1990s. However, it should be borne in mind that even though the eunuch Chen is endowed with a warmly golden light while the heroine is enveloped with gloom, this does not imply that the director wanted to encourage audiences to identify with Chen. On the contrary, the contrast in light emphasises the disparity in power between the characters. The cold colour symbolises the sadness, fear, anxiety and uncertainty of Xinjing's inferior status, as she is controlled by Chen from above. Conversely, the warm colour kindles the certainty, safety and power that the powerful eunuch has, and that Xinjing, in her gloomy situation, desires.

Correspondingly, endowing Xinjing the power to look up and gaze at Chen could be viewed as an expression of her rebellious mood. In other words, Xinjing's looking

⁴⁵ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Fourth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1993), 169-170.

at the eunuch is not really for the purpose of pursuing visual pleasure, it rather provides audiences with an opportunity to gaze at the one of high status. The shots of Chen, which are filmed from Xinjing's viewpoint, are not necessarily of the "body" itself, but also involve a golden dragon chair which Chen is lying on which symbolises supreme power. (Fig 4.13) It is no exaggeration to say that the function of Chen's existence mainly lies in the construction of a power symbol. What Xinjing gazes at or desires is Chen's power, rather than his body. Thus, apart from presenting a consciousness of rebellion, such an act of looking-up could also be associated with an admiration of power, especially considering that he whom Xinjing looks at is an icon of bright power. However, even though Xinjing is given the rights to gaze at Chen, her rights are limited, since To eventually lights Xinjing in a cold colour, and more importantly, her gaze is from a low angle.

4.5.2 Eroticising the image of the eunuch

The desire that motivates Xinjing's gaze also influences the way in which Tang looks at his master, even though it is presented in a different form. The above examination of the image of eunuch Wei reveals that it is in Tang's memory that Wei first makes his appearance. The characteristics of Wei are visualised from Tang's viewpoint. It is common for directors to take the protagonist's point of view to tell a story or to depict other characters. However, what is distinctive is that the director eroticises the image of the eunuch, by not only portraying him as flirting with girls, but also making him a seemingly seductive object for Tang.

Twice in the film, when the girl licks Wei's chin, it is Wei's rather than the girl's face which is in focus. (Figs 4.21 & 4.26) The first time when this happens, Tang has not yet reached Wei's palace. Wei is not portrayed as a dominant gazer in this scene.

When the girl licks him, Wei closes his eyes, and his, instead of the girl's, indulgent look is clearly presented on the screen. (Fig 4.21) When Tang stands in front of Wei's couch and directly looks at him, the licking scene is replayed. Under the gaze of Tang, Wei, who is still flirting with girls, turns his head to observe Tang. (Fig 4.23) In a close-up shot, Wei looks contented with Tang's appearance and mumbles his opinion. At the moment when Wei opens his mouth, the wine held in it dribbles out, with the red liquid streaming down his chin. (Fig 4.25) Another girl then licks the liquid leaking from Wei's mouth. (Fig 4.26) A close-up shot further focuses on Wei's mouth, while the girl is portrayed from her back, her erotic expression now completely hidden. Meantime, Tang's gaze repeatedly reappears in several shots which suggest that Tang witnesses the whole erotic scene and continuously looks straight at Wei. (Figs 4.22, 4.24 and 4.27) In this scene, Wei is like a seducer who observes Tang and at the same time attracts Tang's envious gaze by showing how he flirts with the girls. Tang steadily gazes at Wei, as if he is strongly attracted by Wei and his affair. Even though the girls around Wei could arguably be the visual object of Tang, Wei's figure is the most important one. After Tang enters the palace, the girls' bodies are no longer the centre of attention. This makes the eunuch Wei appear to be the most important visual object of Tang's sexual fantasy.

However, Tang is not coming for visual pleasure; he will be given a new identity by Wei and in the future will become an assassin. This is a crucial moment for Tang, who expects to obtain power from his master, so this scene is presented as an important part of Tang's memory. After Tang is given a new identity, the *mise-en-scène* directly cuts to the mass grave. (Fig 4.36) In this film, Tang repeatedly comes to the mass grave to practice his martial arts skills and steel himself. Meanwhile, the mass grave is also a place where Tang can release his suppressed ego. At the

beginning of the film, when Tang is first shown standing on the top of the mass grave hill, he proclaims that he is an unbeatable assassin, with whom nobody in the world can compare.⁴⁶ By associating the scene of the mass grave with Tang's consciousness of the moment when he is endowed with a new identity by Wei, the director underlines the connection between Tang's sense of self and his perception of being authorised. Tang's immovable stare at Wei indicates an aspiration to be authorised with the equal rights to talk to the authority, rather than a longing for Wei's body. In this circumstance, Wei's power makes him such a seductive image in the eyes of Tang.

4.5.3 An admiration for the eunuch

The inferior's desire for power that influences the construction of the eunuch cannot easily be observed in *New Dragon Gate Inn*, because an inferior character can hardly be identified as one whose point of view is adopted by the director when depicting Cao. However, as previously analysed, the frequent employment of a low angle shot of Cao indicates that the director tends to put himself in the position of the inferior to observe the powerful eunuch. At the beginning of this film, Raymond Lee intensifies the image of Cao through several successive sequences. On most occasions when Cao appears on the screen, he is seen from a low angle. Especially when Lee portrays how Cao and his followers frame and torture Ministry General Yang Yuxuan, as previously stated, almost every shot of Cao is filmed from below. What also deserves notice is that, in this scene, low angle shots are, at the same time, employed in the portrayal of Yang, who is hung up on a rack, and even several times in the

⁴⁶ The original line in Chinese is “杀气腾腾，旁若无人。放眼天下，只我一人”。The English translation could be “Nothing can compare to my devastating power, and no one can compare to me in the world”.

depiction of Cao's followers, who are Cao's assistant eunuchs and soldiers. It might be assumed that the low angle loses its distinction in studying Cao. However, further investigation will reveal this is not true.



Fig4.44



Fig 4.45



Fig 4.46



Fig 4.47



Fig 4.48

No matter whether Cao is the centre of attention or not, almost every time an extreme angle is adopted, Cao's formidable power is conveyed. For instance, when the extreme low angle is employed for the assistant eunuchs, they are always portrayed as standing under the platform where Cao sits; while Cao's image, even

though very small, appears behind them and forms the centre point of the shot. (Figs 4.44 & 4.45) Fig 4.45 depicts how an assistant eunuch abuses power and asks to increase the weight of the torture device for Yang. At this moment, the eunuch's arm in the low angle shot looks disproportionately stretched; his hand seems bigger than it should be and almost reaches the top edge of the screen. However, no matter how powerful the eunuch assistant looks, Cao's central position on the screen and his supervisory status behind the assistant do not change. The bodies of his assistants, who always surround him, are an extension of his power. Besides, when more weight is added to the torture device, Yang is portrayed in extreme low shot angle. From this angle, the camera cannot catch Yang's suffering face, but greatly enlarges the impression of the torture device, which occupies almost half of the screen and even seems about to crush the screen and fall on the heads of audience. (Figs 4.46 & 4.47) By increasing the visual proportion of the torture device, Lee emphasizes the pressure Cao exerts. Therefore, even though the image of Cao is not shown from an extreme low angle, this type of shot, in most cases, is still at the service of highlighting the supreme power of Cao.

It seems that Lee does not employ the viewpoint of any character in the scenes where Cao appears. However, as will be shown in the ensuing analysis, Lee may not want to identify with any individual character in particular, but he does adopt the viewing angle of Cao's followers, even though they are not clearly rebellious, and it is hard for Hong Kong audiences to identify with them. During the whole scene, no shot is filmed from a level higher than the sight line of these followers. When Cao's body is the sole centre of attention, it is as if the camera is shouldered by someone who stands by the side of the assistant eunuchs under the platform to look up at Cao. (Figs 4.40, 4.41, 4.42 and 4.43) The low angle shots at a similar height are also adopted to

depict Yang's suffering. After Yang is tortured to death, Lee even employs an over-the-shoulder shot to depict a eunuch looking up at Yang to confirm his death. (Fig 4.48) To sum up, the low angle shot of Cao, or the action of looking up at Cao, does not simply involve endowing the inferior with the power of gazing. In addition, it also exposes an admiration or adoration for the master. In general, looking up at someone at the top of a hierarchical system can be explained as a manifestation of a rebellious emotion; however, this explanation cannot and should not prevent the possibility of deciphering it as a representation of admiration. Furthermore, although in the eyes of Yang or other heroes in the film, Cao may be an atrocious enemy; in the eyes of the Cao's followers, Cao could be an idol. His choice of standing by the side of Cao's followers reveals Lee's complicated thoughts about power. On the one hand, the image of authority is far from amiable; on the other hand, power is what the disempowered admire and desire. Moreover, almost the whole scene consists of low angle shots; this is beyond the requirements of consecutive cinematographic style, but repeats or rephrases an admiration for the idol of power.

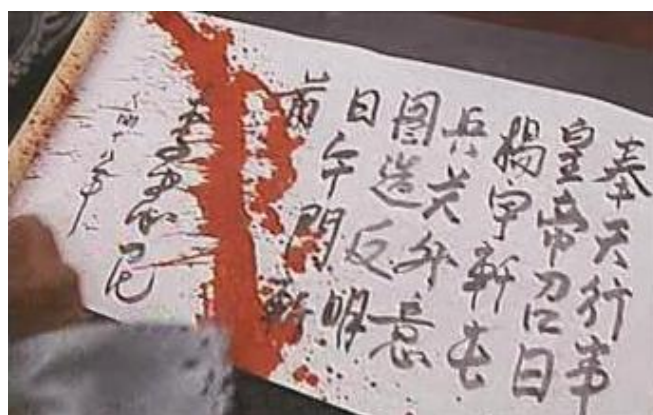


Fig 4.49

In this scene, there is one shot which does not focus on the image of Cao; however, it may help to comprehend Lee's complicated thoughts about power. In order to wrest Yang's military authority, Cao requires his followers to compile an

imperial edict to dismiss Yang from his leadership of the army. Here, the director uses a short take in clear focus to portray this imperial edict from above. (Fig 4.49) This is the only high angle shot in this scene, and is also a point of view shot taken from the angle of a nameless follower of Cao. Forcing audiences to read on the screen may interrupt their visual pleasure, especially when there is a lot to read. Therefore, if something written is important for audiences, this might be expressed in very few words, boldly written, of striking colour, or even aloud read. However, the 2-second take is not long enough for audiences to read all words of the imperial edict. Moreover, the scratchy writing makes it even harder to read. Besides, the informal format and plain paper texture make this imperial edict look quite casual. It could be argued that missing the content of the imperial edict does not impair comprehension of the film, because later on this edict is read out by a eunuch. Nevertheless, Lee gives a close-up shot of it, even though its duration is very short. It is impossible to know precisely what Lee's intention is. However, to certain extent, the informal composition and casual presentation of the imperial edict may echo Hong Kong people's feeling about the Basic Law or the "One Country, Two Systems" constitutional principle, which was passed on their behalf without anyone asking for their consent.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Although Chinese government did care about Hong Kong people's opinion and "appointed a consultative committee of local residents" in the process of drafting the Basic Law, their participation was arranged, as suggested by Steve Tsang, "skilfully". Tang further points out in his work that, "[t]he Basic Law's drafting process is a good illustration of how the PRC's approach to allowing maximum flexibility within a rigid framework works in practice". Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004), 238-244. From a different angle Frank Welsh address the process of the Basic Law drafting in his book like this: "One of the interesting features of the Basic Law drafting process was the opportunity provided for Chinese lawyers and officials to define their own constitutional ideas, but with so many potential misunderstandings, could even a sincere agreement hold up?" See Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 531.

Besides, Lee has another reason to give a shot of this imperial edict, for it is his name rather than the emperor's on the signature. Since Lee is widely known as "Peter Pan" or in other words "old urchin", the absurd signature might be a joke. However, even though this is true, his signing on behalf of emperor in such a casual edict further reveals Lee's complicated thoughts about power. In other words, the action of signing as an emperor echoes Hong Kongers' desire for authority; while the casual style is in line with Hong Kongers' recognition of the diminished possibility for them to be formally empowered.

4.6 Conclusion

The masculinisation of eunuch images in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films in the 1970s could be viewed as a manifestation of the worship of the male body. However, feminising eunuchs in appearance in the following two decades can hardly be interpreted as doing likewise for the female body. Even though more and more female-oriented films, such as *The Heroic Trio*, appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, drawing wide attention, they did not affect the male's leading position in most Hong Kong films.

Eunuch characters in this period, especially in the golden decade of the 1980s and 1990s, were generally feminised in both their appearance and in their gaze relationship with their subordinates. They are characterised as eye-catching spectacles, and audiences are encouraged to stand in the position of an inferior to gaze at them. The directors, on the one hand, endow the inferior with the power to gaze at the master; but on the other hand, they also clearly realise that such power is conditioned,

and that inferiors cannot really stand at an equal position to gaze at their master. Therefore, in the eyes of the inferior the masters are mostly presented in low angle shots. Looking up at the powerful eunuch could be linked to the rebellious emotion of the inferior; besides, such an action could also be associated with the inferior's desire to be empowered. Furthermore, such a desire could arouse an admiration for powerful idols and make these images inviting visual objects.

The changes in the manner of portraying eunuch images from the 1960s to the 1990s reveal a transformation in how directors view the power structure in different periods. In the 1960s and 1970s, directors stood at the side of powerful persona to depict the eunuchs' privileged gaze; while in the following two decades, directors took the position of the inferior to describe the rebellious mood and desire of the inferior. It is true that eunuchs' powerful status is challenged when they are portrayed as the visual objects of their subordinates. However, this does not mean that the dualistic power structure is overturned. Furthermore, even though the subject and the object of the gaze are swapped, this does not undermine the association between the privileged gaze and the hierarchical power structure. From a gender perspective, Judith Butler addresses the dualistic power mechanism in her noted work *Gender Trouble*. "Power seemed to be more than an exchange between subjects or a relation of constant inversion between a subject and an Other; indeed, power appeared to operate in the production of that very binary frame for thinking about gender."⁴⁸ This implies that, if possession of a privileged gaze is still a representation of the acquisition of power, the dualistic power structure will not be mutilated, no matter how the subjects and objects change.

⁴⁸ Judith Butler, "Preface", *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), vii-viii.

Chapter 5: Indefinite Gender Characteristics

Eunuch Images in Co-productions in the Early Twenty-first Century

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Three deals with eunuch images constructed in the 1960s and 1970s in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films. In these films, the eunuch characters look tough, exhibit masculine pursuits to high political status and martial arts, and have the dominant position in their gaze relationship with the others of low status. Chapter Four centres on eunuch images in the same genre made in the 1980s and 1990s. In this period, the construction of eunuch images inherits features such as seizing high political power and achieving the superb level in martial arts. On the other hand, these eunuchs are clearly feminised in their appearance and are portrayed as visual objects of the characters who are lower in rank. Although, the dualistic power mechanism was still influential in constructing eunuchs – the power icon, the challenge to their privileged gaze implies that the hierarchical power structure as well as the masculinisation of eunuchs was starting to be questioned. This chapter will focus on eunuch images in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films produced in the 2000s and early 2010s. In these films, eunuchs still have excellent martial arts skills, as usual. However, they have the following distinguished differences from the previous productions: they are subject to someone who is politically higher than them; their ultimate pursuit is not limited to political power only; in their sexual encounters with women, they usually take the passive role. It seems that they are neither hypermasculinised nor exaggeratedly demasculinized. However, from a different perspective, by clearly displaying both

masculine and feminine traits, the construction of eunuchs' gender characteristics may also imply a performance between different gender identities.

Since the year 1997 when Hong Kong was handed over from Britain to China, it became a Special Administrative Region under the policy of "one country, two systems". With a high degree of autonomy, Hong Kong owns its independent legislative power, has its political and economic structure separated from the central China system. Under such circumstance, Hong Kong's film industry on the one hand benefit from the exploration of a huge Mainland market, the investment and cooperation outside Hong Kong, on the other hand encounters a great challenge from the adaptation to a new market and a different censorship.

Before the handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty, the Hong Kong film industry started to undergo a depressed state at the end of its "golden age" around 1993, and has not completely recovered to date. Soon after the handover, the devastating 1997 Asian financial crisis seriously hit Hong Kong economy and this influence kept affecting Hong Kong cinema in the early 2000s. Besides, the outbreak of SARS (Severe acute respiratory syndrome) virus in 2002 and 2003 in southern China emptied quite a few movie theatres for several months. A 2007 journal paper by Hong Kong scholar Zhong Baoxian particularly looks into its rise and fall from 1997 to 2007 in term of production, distribution and box-office profits.¹ Zhong clearly reveals the dilemma of Hong Kong film industry which continued to slump during the ten years after the handover. However, paradoxically, according to Zhong, what accompanied the decline was the remarkable proportional growth of co-productions.²

¹ Baoxian Zhong, "The Rise and Fall of the Variable Hong Kong Films from 1997 to 2007" (香港电影业的兴衰变换 (1997-2007)), *Contemporary Cinema* 3 (2007): 69-73. Print.

² Ibid.

Such a growth could typically be attributed to the implementation of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA for short) which was signed in 2003 between the government of Hong Kong and the central government of China. CEPA encourages the cooperation between Hong Kong and Mainland in most fields and promotes Hong Kong's economic growth. Also based on this arrangement, Hong Kong-made Chinese-language movies would not be subject to the quota restriction which is imposed on foreign movies when they are imported into the Mainland market.³ Hong Kong and Mainland co-productions would be treated as domestic films in the mainland area.⁴ Encouraged by these principles, in an increasing number, Hong Kong filmmakers have chosen to cooperate with mainland filmmakers.

Nonetheless, in this adventure, many Hong Kong directors struggle in a dilemma during the cooperation journey: they are conscious of the need to retain their Hong Kong uniqueness but at the same time have to cater to the cultural tastes for the mainland China audience who do not necessarily identify with their Hong Kong sentiments. Hong Kong director Peter Chan (陈可辛), who has achieved impressive success in making a series of co-productions in the mainland area, stresses in a 2012 interview that his adventure and even his achievement in several big-budget co-productions are not the result of his free choice.⁵ Jonnie To (杜琪峰), who is known as the godfather of Hong Kong gangster films and has reserved a distinct Hong Kong style in most of his works, had kept his filmmaking in Hong Kong till the end of

³ Regarding to the regulations and rules of CEPA in details, Hong Kong government have attached them on its official website: *Trade and Industry Department, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*. See "Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA)", *tid.gov.hk*. 30 June. 2016 (Last Review Date), accessed 1 July. 2016. <https://www.tid.gov.hk/english/cepa/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Stern Criticism over the Industrial Mode of Chinese Films: An Interview of Peter Chan in Venice" (威尼斯专访: 陈可辛狠批中国模式), *hk.apple.nextmedia.com*. 8 September. 2012, accessed 1 July. 2016. <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/entertainment/art/20120908/18010444>

2000s, and eventually started to get involved in making co-productions in Mainland China in 2010. At a 2012 symposium on the development of Hong Kong-made films after the implementation of CEPA, To clearly states that he divides his films into two groups with one group typically serving Hong Kong's film-goers, and the other which is generally consisted of co-productions mainly aiming at the Mainland market.⁶ Some of To's films even has two endings to meet the requirements of different markets as well as censorships. On the one hand, both Chan To's opinions and reveal that the distinct Hong Kong cultural identity could have been impaired in most co-productions; On the other hand, their approach, especially To's strategy typically present how Hong Kong director adjust their filmmaking between two systems, or swing between performing two identities.

Along with the boom of co-productions around the early 2010s, the debate on the presumed death of Hong Kong film, which was initially noted and discussed on the eve of the 1997 handover, has been raised again. These debates, concerns and sometimes even moans about the lost Hong Kong characteristics have, on the one hand exposed the dilemma of Hong Kong film; while on the other hand, arousing a widespread concern over the definition and development of Hong Kong film. According to the Hong Kong filmmaker Herman Yau Lai-To (邱礼涛), who is excellent in directing cult films and independent short videos, the term Hong Kong-made film, in fact, had not been seriously defined before the implementation of CEPA.⁷ It is the commercial success of the co-productions since 2003 that impels the

⁶ The 2012 symposium on the decadence and rise of Hong Kong-made films was attended by two famous directors John Woo and Yau Lai-To and an active film critic Shum Long-tin. Their speech content has been recorded in a number of articles specially written on this symposium. One of the article is seen Oiwan Lam, "The Final Click on Cultural Stability and Uprising: The Decadence and Rise of Hong Kong-made films", *Cultural Studies@Lingnan* 30 (2012), August. 2012, accessed 1 July. 2016. <http://commons.ln.edu.hk/mcsln/vol30/iss1/9/>

⁷ Ibid.

intensive investigation of Hong Kong-made film.⁸ This situation suggests that Hong Kong's characteristics as well as its cultural subjectivity currently discussed might be constructed on an imagination or expectation of Hong Kong rather than on the real Hong Kong. At the beginning of her article on the topic of postcolonial Hong Kong cinema, Pang Lai-kwan addresses "the articulation of the local" and states that, in the context of post-colonialism and Chinese nationalism, "Hong Kong people perform their need of a concrete Hong Kong precisely because there is no more of it".⁹ Through the examination of Hong Kong films in the postcolonial discourse, Pang argues that, rather than erasing the nation, "transnationalism leads to the production of the local, and that this local Hong Kong is most concrete when Hong Kong becomes most transnational and dispersed".¹⁰ It is perhaps based on the Hong Kong images that are mirrored in the co-productions, Hong Kong's current cultural characteristics as critically conceived.

It is true that the indigenous Hong Kong cultural elements are, in most cases, diluted in the co-productions which largely focus on the requirements of Mainland audiences, rather than that of Hong Kong people. Therefore, most co-productions could hardly be welcomed by Hong Kong audiences. However, mainland film-goers expect to see some Hong Kong elements in these co-productions. The current Hong Kong characteristics are actually constructed on the expectation of audiences from both areas, notwithstanding the disparities in their expectations. Since the end of the 2000s, an increasing number of co-productions, such as *IP Man* (叶问, 2008), *Gallants* (打擂台, 2010), *A Simple Life* (桃姐, 2012), and *The Grandmaster* (一代宗

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Laikwan Pang, "Postcolonial Hong Kong Cinema: Utilitarianism and (Trans)local", *Postcolonial Studies* 10 (2007): 413. Print.

¹⁰ Ibid.

师, 2013), have not only achieved box-office success in both Hong Kong and mainland markets, but also got Hong Kong people's approval for presenting typical Hong Kong ideas. In a 2014 review article on the film *The Grandmaster*, Shum Longtin (岑朗天) claims that Hong Kong filmmakers have successfully found their way in making co-productions which could not only meet the requirement of the mainland censorship, but also retain typical Hong Kong characteristics.¹¹ This implies that, despite their struggle for the cultural specificities, Hong Kong filmmakers, on the whole, are choosing to restore the Hong Kong cultural identity by incorporating it into a larger culture community. So-called Hong Kong film is likewise undergoing changes in order to meet the needs of the new Hong Kong audience. Even many of the elements that are recognised as typical Hong Kong iconic symbols are re-described to meet the market needs. A large number of directors would like to repackage the past classic Hong Kong ideas in the current co-productions. The most typical examples are the 2014 *From Vegas to Macau* (澳门风云), and its two sequels released in 2015 and 2016, in which the local director Wong Jing (王晶) repackages Zhou Yun-fat's classical image as the God of Gamblers, which was quite popular in the early 1990s.

The rise in co-production conjures up a crisis of the Hong Kong identity, but also provides an opportunity to redefine its identity. The new forms of eunuch in the two films *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* and *Reign of Assassins* will provide some insights into the changes of the Hong Kong films. Eunuchs' different gender

¹¹ Longtin Shum, "What Frighten Hong Kong People? – Starting from the Comments on the Award Ceremony of Hong Kong Film Awards" (香港人怕什么—从香港电影金像奖颁奖礼说起), *pentoy.hk*. 22 April. 2014, accessed 1 July. 2016. <http://wp.me/p2VwFC-6c2>

characteristics may play a helpful barometer in the exploration of Hong Kong's swinging identity between two systems in one country.

5.2 Film Synopses

Two films have been selected for this chapter. They are *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* (龙门飞甲, 2011) and *Reign of Assassins* (剑雨, 2010). Their synopses are as below.

Flying Swords of Dragon Gate, directed by Tsui Hark (徐克), is the first 3D *wuxia* film co-produced by a long list of production partners, including Bona International Film Group, SMG Pictures, China Film Group, Shine Show Interactive Media Co., Ltd, to name just a few. This film can be viewed as a remake of *Dragon Inn* (1967) and *New Dragon Gate Inn* (1992) which have been studied in Chapter Four and Chapter Five respectively. For instance, the main storylines of all the three films portray how the imperial eunuch tries to trap his political opponents at a place called Dragon Gate (龙门). Meanwhile, *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* is also deemed as a sequel of *New Dragon Gate Inn*. The male and female protagonists, Zhao Huai'an (赵怀安, played by Jet Li Lianjie 李连杰) and Ling Yanqiu (凌雁秋, played by Zhou Xun 周迅), in *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* obviously refer to the two key roles in *New Dragon Gate Inn* – Zhou Huai'an and Jin Xiangyu.

Notwithstanding the similar designs, Tsui denies that *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* is a remake, but emphasizes its originality.¹² To be specific, *Dragon Inn* and *New Dragon Gate Inn* begin with scenes of the East Bureau slaughtering their dissidents, while the first scene of the film *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* not only portrays the East Bureau's autocracy, but also depicts how the eunuch leader of the East Bureau is defeated by the hero Zhao Huai'an.¹³ Besides, even though the eunuch Yu Huatian (雨化田, played by Chen Kun 陈坤), the head of the West Bureau, also tries to eradicate the hero Zhao by a trap like his counterparts in previous films, his bait is a pregnant imperial maid rather than orphans of the framed loyal official.¹⁴ Moreover, the imperial maid is finally proven to be a confederate of Yu and she is not pregnant. In addition, the latter part of the film involves a treasure hunt storyline happened at Dragon Gate. Although this design impairs the intensity of the primary contradiction between heroes and villains, it contributes more spectacles for this film.

Reign of Assassins, co-directed by Su Chao-bin (苏照彬) and John Woo (吴宇森), is a *wuxia* film co-produced by Beijing Galloping Horse Films Co., Ltd, Media Asia Films Ltd (Hong Kong), Lumiere Motion Picture Corporation (Taiwan) and few other minor partner companies.¹⁵ This film consists of three main storylines woven

¹² "The *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* Starts Filming", *CRIENGLISH.com*, 11 October. 2010, accessed 1 July. 2016. <http://english.cri.cn/6666/2010/10/11/63s598651.htm>

¹³ East Bureau is simultaneously a supervisory organ, a secret service and a police force which owns a privilege and led by the eunuch who is trusted by the emperor in Ming Dynasty.

¹⁴ West Bureau is also a secret service, headed by the eunuch who is the emperor's trusted aid.

Chen Kun, born in 1976, has acted the male protagonist in various TV plays and films. Representative TV plays include *Love Story in Shanghai* (2001), *The Story of Noble Family* (2003), etc., and films, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2002), *The Knot* (2006), *Painted Skin* (2008), etc. He won or was dominated as the Best Actor at various awards. Most of his roles on screen are good-looking young men, and he has a huge number of female fans.

¹⁵ The director and screenwriter Su Chao-bin was born in Taiwan, and mainly has practiced his filmmaking in Taiwan. However, he employed a lot of Hong Kong film ideas in his films, especially in the horror films he worked on. Moreover, he has plenty of experiences of working with Hong Kong filmmakers, such as Peter Chan, Matt Chow, Teddy Chan and John Woo.

together. The first storyline tells how the female protagonist Drizzle (细雨, played by Kelly Lin, 林熙蕾), an assassin of the Dark Stone gang, tries to cease her assassin life and becomes an ordinary person. In order to change her life, Drizzle changes her face into an ordinary look and her name to Zeng Jing (曾静, played by Michelle Yeoh, 杨紫琼). After that, she meets the male protagonist Jiang Ah-sheng (江阿生, played by Jung Woo-Sung, 郑雨盛), a poor courier, and marries him.

The second storyline portrays how the Wheel King (转轮王, played by Wang Xueqi, 王学圻), the head of the Dark Stone gang, looks for the magic martial arts which are believed by most characters in this story to be inherent in the remains of Luo Mo.¹⁶ In the end, Wheel King is revealed as a humble eunuch who wants to have his penis re-growing with help of magic martial arts.

The third storyline centres on the male protagonist Jiang Ah-sheng, whose original name was Zhang Renfeng and whose father was killed by the Dark Stone gang for the sake of plundering the remains of Luo Mo. Like Zeng, Jiang also has his face changed, but his aim is to revenge on the Dark Stone gang. At last, his wife Zeng, who used to be a member of this gang, kills Wheel King for him.

Both films were collaborated works between mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan film practitioners and were released in these three regions as their primary market. Tsui and Woo are internationally famous *wuxia* genre directors whose reputation can easily draw a wide range of *wuxia* audiences. Besides, both films

¹⁶ Wang Xueqi, born in 1946, has acted in a lot of TV plays and films. Representative TV plays include *Love is Sun* (2001), *The Past Stories in Western Hu'nan* (2006), etc., and films, *Yellow Earth* (1984), *The Big Parade* (1986), *Forever Enthralled* (2008), *Bodyguards and Assassins* (2010), *Sacrifice* (2010), etc. He is not famous for his appearance, but is well-known for his performance skills and experiences. He was nominated as the Best Supportive Actor in the 30th Hong Kong Film Awards for playing Wheel King in *Reign of Assassins*.

selected here have won extensive public acclaim which includes the approval from Hong Kong audiences.¹⁷

5.3 The beautiful representation of the eunuch



Fig 5.01

Unlike his counterparts in the previous Hong Kong *wuxia* films, Yu Huatian could be defined as a quite beautiful eunuch. He is played by a handsome mainland actor, Chen Kun, who is well received by mainland audiences, especially female ones.

¹⁷ *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* used approximately US\$35 million of production cost and reaped a mega profit of over US\$100 million box office. Paralleling the considerable commercial success, this film also has won arresting awards. For instance, the film won the Best Visual Effect Award in the Asian Film Award, the Golden Horse Award and the Hong Kong Film Award. Besides, this film was nominated for the Best Film in the Asian Film Award; the director Tsui Hark was nominated for the Best Director in the Asian Film Award, the Hong Kong Film Award and the Hundred Flowers Award. Acting as the leading heroine, Zhou Xun was nominated for the Best Actress at the Beijing Student Film Festival, the Hong Kong Film Award, the Hong Kong Film Critics Society Award and the Hundred Flowers Award.

Although *Reign of Assassins* did not make as large profit as *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, it actually received quite sound praise both inside and outside China. This 2010 film has frequently been compared to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and even in the beginning of 2016, it was still recognised by some Chinese audiences as Michelle Yeoh's best *wuxia* film. See "Michelle Yeoh's best *wuxia* film is not *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, but *Reign of Assassins*" (杨紫琼最好的武侠片不是卧虎藏龙, 而是它!), *toutiao.com*. 19 February. 2016, accessed 1 July. 2016. <http://toutiao.com/i6252847008311149057/> On the website of *Film Business Asia*, Derek Elley assesses that "without heavy resort to visual effects, and without going too far down any one stylistic road, the film gives new life to a genre that's been pulled every which way in the past 20 years in search of new thrills." Derek Elley, "Reign of Assassins", *Film Business Asia*, 3 September. 2010, accessed 1 July. 2016. <http://www.filmbiz.asia/reviews/reign-of-assassins> Besides, this film helped Su Chao-pin win the 17th Hong Kong Film Critics Society Award.

From the above figure, it is evident that the dress of Yu is elaborately designed with exquisite embroideries. (Fig 5.01) Moreover, it is not difficult to notice that, in this film, not only Yu, but also his subordinates are all dressed finely. Compared to the heroes and heroines who are in plain dresses, the images of the eunuch and his people contribute an important visual spectacle for this film. From his appearance, Yu does not show much tough masculinity as his counterparts in films of the 1970s; he is slightly feminised, but not as much as the eunuch characters in the 1980s and 1990s. Besides, Tsui does not employ a high-pitched voice or apparent ladylike gesture to construct Yu. In sum, Yu is characterised at a moderate level in his masculinity and femininity. Without being told he is a eunuch, an audience could obtain enough indication to perceive his femininity from his exquisite appearance; meantime, a fan of actor Chen could also treat Yu as a male from his unaffected movements and natural voice.

Apart from the difference in appearance, another distinction from the eunuch characters created in the last century to Yu lies in the portrayal of their relationship with women. Such a portrayal is not common in the construction of these powerful eunuchs in Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre. Among the *wuxia* films examined in previous chapters, only *Ninja Wolves* (锦衣卫, 1979) by Luo Chi (罗炽, whose alias is Luo Tzou, 罗祖) and *The Assassin* (刺客新传—杀人者唐斩) by Billy Siu-Hung Chung (钟少雄) contain the implication of eunuchs' sexual relationship with women. In these two films, both eunuchs occupy a dominant role in comparison with that of the women who are politically inferior to these eunuchs. These relationships mainly assist the construction of a hierarchical power structure. This being the case, does the

similar plot in the film *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* serve the construction of a similar power mechanism?

5.3.1 Serving the woman

In *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, it is hinted that Yu has sexual encounters with the imperial concubine Wan (万贵妃, played by Zhang Xinyu 张馨予). In order to examine the function of constructing Yu and Wan's relationship, it is necessary to first investigate how this relationship is portrayed in the film. In light of the traditional Chinese ideology, Wan, as a royal, is politically superior to the chief eunuch Yu. Thus, Wan, although she is a woman, occupies a *yang* position, while Yu, a *yin* position. Such a hierarchical distance feminises Yu in their relationship. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that Yu behaves like a puppy of Wan when he is asked to amuse his master. (Fig 5.02 shows that Yu is holding Wan's puppy.) This is for the first time that a powerful eunuch, in the *wuxia* genre directed by a Hong Kong filmmaker, is portrayed as a servant of a woman. The classical Hong Kong eunuch image, which used to be the symbol of supreme power, becomes less powerful in the postcolonial period. Instead of displaying the director's attitudinal change towards the hegemonic power, such a transition suggests a possibility of blurring the clear hierarchical boundaries which were previously established through highlighting the chief eunuch's supremacy.



Fig 5.02

Yu and Wan's relationship could further be observed in the scene where they are portrayed as flirting with each other. This scene was directed by Tsui in person. When he filmed this part, Tsui coached the actress Zhang Xinyu in how to flirt with Yu's portrayal Chen by demonstrating the movements in details.¹⁸ Interestingly, both portrayers of these two characters are well-received idols in reality. As previously introduced, Chen is a handsome mainland young actor who has a great number of female fans. Wan's portrayal Zhang is a mainland actress and model, who is known as the sexiest Chinese football babe as well as the first beauty of Chinese online games. It makes sense that most viewers, before watching this film, would pre-conceive Zhang's image as a sexy visual object of a man. Moreover, Zhang does look appealing in the film. Zhang's image is quite inviting in this film for not only her beautiful face, but also her luxurious dress and heavy makeup.

Referring to Freud's comments on the masculine/feminine with the active/passive aim of libido, and Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror phase, Laura Mulvey deduced an active-male and passive-female gaze pattern from her research on Hollywood films.¹⁹ By binding the psychoanalytic theories with her feminist standpoint, Mulvey stresses that, in the phallogentric order or patriarchal system, female characters are likely to be displayed as erotic objects for both male characters on the screen and the male spectators inside the auditorium to gaze at.²⁰ Male characters, on the other hand, are easily portrayed as controlling figures as well as

¹⁸ This information is found in the popular Chinese television talk show *A Date with Lu Yu*, on Phoenix Television (Hong Kong) and Anhui STV (Hefei) broadcasted on 03 January 2012. The hostess Lu Yu interviews Tsui Hark and Chen Kun in this programme.

¹⁹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema", *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 58-69.

²⁰ Ibid.

gaze agents of looking.²¹ The male character, in this pattern, functions as an ideal ego, with whom the spectator may identify. Mulvey's deductions provide an angle to examine the relationship between Yu and Wan in the scene where they flirt with each other. However, what should be borne in mind is that Yu is not a typical male, and it is hard for the spectator to identify with him. In addition, as discussed in Chapter One, a man does not have to be dominant and a woman does not have to be submissive. In different social systems, they may perform in totally different ways according to the social expectation. In Hong Kong *wuxia* genre made previously, for instance, in the 1979 *Ninja Wolves*, a eunuch's concubine is described as paying with her life for secretly gazing at the eunuch. This indicates that the phallogentric order is not allowed to be challenged, even though the image of the man is acted by a eunuch. However, in the 2011 *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, the pattern of the gaze between the chief eunuch and a woman is organised differently.



Fig 5.03



Fig 5.04



Fig 5.05



Fig 5.06

²¹ Ibid.



Fig 5.07

Several shots of representative moments in Yu and Wan's flirting with each other are selected above. As soon as they sit alongside on Wan's couch, both of their side faces appear in a two shot. (Fig 5.03) However, these two subjects are not equally important. Although Wan is close to the camera, it is Yu who is focused and prettified, since the full silhouette of the side of his face appears along the central axis of this shot. Sunlight, coming from the outside, delineates and lights up Yu's attractive features. Although the following figure could be a good instance of fetishizing part of woman's body, with Wan's foot and naked leg being centred, it is not a close-up and this shot slightly distorts and shortens the actress Zhang's well-proportioned leg. (Fig 5.04) Both shots introduced above are filmed neither from Yu's side nor from a site in the middle of Yu and Wan. The place of camera is close to Wan's side and Wan keeps looking at Yu's movements in the process of their flirtation. (Fig 5.05) Therefore, it is reasonable to deduce that Yu is in the passive position of being gazed by Wan, and Wan's point of view is reinforced by the angle of the camera. Subsequently, Wan's gaze at Yu is further confirmed in next figure with her eyes directly lingering on Yu's face. (Fig 5.06) This figure continues to portray Wan as actively engaged in looking at Yu as she takes the lead and embraces him. Even in this shot when they look at each other, Yu is still set in the passive position. Specifically, Wan's head is higher than Yu's, so Yu has to look up while Wan looks down. Such a shot is similar to the Hollywood shots of sexual encounter, in which the woman customarily looks up in a high angle shot. In this frame, Wan's face is hardly visible while Yu's face appears on

the screen. In addition, a beam of light from the opposite side of the sunlight lightens half of Yu's face. Such design further demonstrates that Yu is fixed as an important visual object and is in the place "*to-be-looked-at*".²²

Through the exploitation on Wan and Yu's relationship on the screen, and taking into consideration Chen's popularity about women audience, it is reasonable to say that Wan may act as a gaze agent for female audiences who want to gaze at Chen. In light of Mulvey's finding on the interactive relation between fantasy world and reality, it is convincible to suggest that the female gaze has been on the stage and upheld.²³ The female gaze, especially the gaze of mainland female audiences, may play an important role for the reconstruction of the eunuch image from an autocratic dominator to a sexual object for a woman.

However, all the above analyses are not suggesting that Tsui prevents audiences' consumption of the image of Wan. On the one hand, the character Wan herself plays an ideal object who can meet the requirements of audiences' fantasy. Audiences who enjoy her figure can gaze at her directly without identifying with any gaze agent in the film, especially in the circumstance where the gazer of Wan is not clearly defined. On the other hand, Tsui does encourage the spectator to gaze at Wan, especially at the end of this scene, when Wan lifts up his face to the camera express her contentment with Yu's response to her sexual desire. (Fig 5.07) At this moment, she is still leaning herself on Yu's body. Yu seems holding a power to gaze at her; however, his head is still lower than Wan's and his whole face is shadowed. He cannot really watch Wan's

²² Ibid., 63.

²³ Ibid., 62. In her "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema", Mulvey points out that "In *reality* the fantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it."

full countenance of indulgence. These designs indicate that Tsui does encourage audiences to gaze at Wan, but not from Yu's point of view.

Besides, their different privileges in their mutual gazes could also be argued as resulting from an unchanged hierarchical construction, because Yu is politically inferior to Wan. Meantime, he should behave obediently and even willingly in his response to Wan's active pursuit of sexual desire. This possibility should not be denied. However, what should also be noticed is that, in the previous Hong Kong films, such as the 1971 *The Eunuch* and the 1984 *Secret Service of the Imperial Court*, two chief eunuchs are portrayed as having the supreme power and they can manipulate or even murder their lords. The focus of constructing the previous eunuchs is on their power. They are depicted as a threat to the power order. However, in *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, the focus is shifted from Yu's power to his body, even though the dualistic power mechanism could still be observed in the construction of Yu and Wan's relationship in both gender and hierarchical aspects.

5.3.2 Seduction beyond the dualistic gaze pattern

Apart from creating visible visual pleasure for spectators, the presentation of Yu and Wan's flirting with each other also creates another type of attraction for audiences, or, a different type of seduction. In the words of Jean Baudrillard, a French philosopher and cultural theorist, the seduction is "radically opposed to anatomy as destiny" and "breaks the distinctive sexualisation of bodies and the inevitable phallic economy that results".²⁴ This section has so far discussed the fascination of the eunuch Yu within the dualistic formula of active-gazer and passive-gazed. In the latter part of this section, the appeal of Yu will be explored in respect of Baudrillard's

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 10.

discussion about seduction, which symbolises a principle that “abolishes the differential opposition”.²⁵

Baudrillard suggests that seduction embodies strategies of “play, challenges, duels” and “appearance”.²⁶ All of these strategies imply the “principle of uncertainty.”²⁷ Baudrillard introduces the phenomenon of transvestism to illustrate the principle of uncertainty. He describes that, in the transvestites’ game, sexual signs are separate from the biological matrix, and such separation causes the uncertainty in determining their sexes.²⁸ From Baudrillard’s description, the principle of uncertainty can be understood as the flotation of sexual signs. In addition, he points out that the fascination of the transvestites’ game derives from the sexual vacillation, while not from the attraction between certain sexes.²⁹ In other words, the flotation of the sexual signs seduces, rather than real sexes that seduce. That is to say, the secret of the seduction derives from the “*transsubstantiation of sex into signs*”.³⁰

In the film *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, the construction of Yu had successfully seduced audiences. Despite the fact that the world-famous kung fu master Jet Li plays the protagonist, it was Chen who was nominated for the Favourite Actor in the People’s Choice Award among Asian Film Awards.³¹ Tsui stated that, “like his weapon and strategy, Yu Huatian is unfathomable in various aspects, and

²⁵ Ibid., 12.

²⁶ Ibid., 7.

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁸ Ibid., 12.

²⁹ Ibid., 12.

³⁰ Ibid., 13.

³¹ The awards the film *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* has won are clearly recorded on various online databases. The Internet Movie Database is one of them. “*Flying Swords of Dragon Gate: Awards*”, *IMDb.com*, accessed 1 July. 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1686784/awards>

you will desire to find out more about Yu.”³² Among the various unfathomable aspects, one displays the play of sexual signs of eunuch Yu. This aspect is embodied in a fact which is many audiences questioned, whether Yu is a real eunuch or a fake eunuch, and this question quickly became one of the most popular questions asked by spectators.³³ Yu is portrayed as the sexual object of Wan. A few details in this film suggest that Wan desires Yu very much. When people suggest that Yu is not a real eunuch, a conservative sexual view is displayed. That is audiences feel reluctant to accept the fact that a eunuch can have sexual relationship with a woman. Besides, it is not surprising that lots of audiences held such query after watching this film, because the filmmakers did play a trick.

Zhu Yali (朱雅麗), a female screenwriter of this film, responded to this question like this, “during the process of writing the script, we have never definitively fixed this role into a real eunuch or a fake eunuch.”³⁴ Even the actor Chen did not get a definite answer from Tsui on this question despite querying it for several times.³⁵ Furthermore, Zhu also responded this by saying, “no matter real or fake, the sexual affair between the eunuch and the concubine in this story is reasonable. That is because no matter real or fake, the eunuch can serve the woman well in various aspects”.³⁶ Zhu’s comments on the popular question about Yu typically represent a woman’s standpoint, and such a standpoint further supports that Yu is characterised as

³² “Deciphering Six Secrets of the Weapons Designed for Characters of *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*” (导演徐克解读六大兵器设计玄机), *ent.163.com*, accessed 1 July. 2016.
<http://ent.163.com/special/lmfjch3/>

³³ “Answers from the Screenwriter of *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*: It Make Sense No Matter Yu Huatian is A Real Eunuch or Not” (《龙门飞甲》编剧答疑：雨化田是真假太监都能解释通), *ent.ifeng.com*, 30 December. 2011, accessed 1 July. 2016.
http://ent.ifeng.com/movie/special/lmfj/zuixin/detail_2011_12/30/11676324_0.shtml

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Wan's servant in various aspects. In her answer, Zhu attaches more attention on woman's feeling. Although this argument may not reflect the opinion of all women, it displays a thought which is distant from the dualistic opposition centring on men's subjectivity.

Besides, what deserves more notice is that Zhu answered the question cunningly, with the key query, whether the eunuch is real or not, being avoided. In fact, the trick of Yu's gender exists in the third version of the film script, in which Yu is claimed to be a fake eunuch by the Concubine Wan. However, this detail cannot be found in the film. That is to say, Zhu's comment above about Yu's true sex identity is questionable. Furthermore, such a change between the film and the script proves that the portrayal of Yu's sex has been deliberately designed. Through such design, Yu's sex becomes uncertain and indeterminate, and moves among different sexual signs. His official title, his costume as well as his exquisite makeup indicate that he is a eunuch, while the portrayal of Wan's sexual desire for him confuses audiences. What should be emphasised here is that Tsui is not raising a question such as whether female's sexual fulfilment need or not come from the sexual encounter with a real man. If any audience is bothered by this or other related questions, and thus reviewing Yu's image and this film, he or she is successfully caught in Tsui's trap.

Crucial to the query about Yu's gender is not a clear answer. What is worth-noting here should be that the little trick in constructing Yu's sex successfully aroused audiences' interest in Yu's image and to this film. It is just because Yu's gender signs are floating and uncertain, that Yu successfully seduces. In other words, no matter whether Yu is a real eunuch or not, he has already seduced the audiences to consume the film or pay more attention to this film from which audiences believe that they may

find the answer. On this point, the truth of whether the eunuch is a real or fake eunuch has lost all its meanings. From this point of view, it could be said that apart from his beautiful appearance, the flotation of his sexual signs also contributes to Yu's seduction.

What should be borne in mind is that, the flotation of signs will lead to "the flotation of law that regulates the difference between sexes".³⁷ The process of the construction of Yu's sex and audiences' debate on it indicate that audiences are on the way to being deprived of their active gazing position. Their consumption of the spectacle is partially manipulated by the visual objects. Baudrillard is right, "[y]ou no longer watch TV, it is TV that watches you (live)', ... in which the distinction between the passive and the active is abolished."³⁸

5.4 A passive lover pursuer

This section also contains two parts, with the former one examining the eunuch Wheel King's image from his sexual encounters with his subordinate Turquoise and the latter analysing the portrayal of Wheel King as a lover pursuer. He will be revealed as falling in love with Turquoise. In the history of Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre, Wheel King is the first eunuch, as a key villain, to be portrayed as a love pursuer of a woman, rather than only desiring her sexually.

³⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 6.

³⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 29.

5.4.1 Lost in the sexual encounter



Fig 5.08

As previously stated, in Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre, the eunuch's sexual encounter with a woman is uncommon. However, there are two plots in the film concentrating on the sexual relationship between Wheel King and Turquoise. What is equally noteworthy is that Wheel King does not look like a eunuch. He usually wears a dark cloak with most of his physical characteristics being hidden. (Fig 5.08 depicts the first appearance of Wheel King in the eyes of Turquoise.) Moreover, he deliberately speaks in a calm and low voice, which helps him conceal his emotions. He even wears fake beards for the purpose of hiding his real status as a eunuch. The sexual encounters between Wheel King and Turquoise also outline a conservative sexual idea, because one reason for Turquoise pursuing her sexual desire for him lies in that she believes he is a real man in sex. This implies that it is not a eunuch who attracts her, but a real man. As soon as she finds that Wheel King is a eunuch, she directly stops her fantasy about him.

Turquoise undresses for Wheel King for the first time after she witnesses him breaching the rules of the Dark Stone gang by promising, conditionally, to free Zeng and her husband from the Dark Stone gang. Turquoise envies Zeng, so she decides to seduce Wheel King in order to consolidate her position in the gang. Since the actress

Barbie Hsu (徐熙媛), who plays Turquoise, is a popular icon in China, this scene could be an erotic selling point for the box-office, featuring a naked Barbie Hsu. In other words, it is reasonable to suggest that directors Su and Woo have intentionally set Turquoise as a sexual object for Wheel King. The following figures record typical moments in this process



Fig 5.09



Fig 5.10



Fig 5.11

As expected, Turquoise is portrayed as an erotic object for audiences. According to Mulvey's study on visual pleasure, the woman as the erotic object is always deprived of her identity and her body is usually "stylised and fragmented by close-ups".³⁹ The figure 5.11 frames Turquoise's naked body without her face. This shot implies that Turquoise in this scene is treated as a visual object without a voice and an identity. However, the issue of whether the camera endows Wheel King the power to be an active gazer and positions Turquoise as a passive visual object needs further discussion.

First, questions like who is active and who is passive in this sexual encounter deserve further analysis. Despite being the erotic object, it is very hard to claim that

³⁹ Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema", 63-65.

Turquoise plays a passive role. In this sequence, Turquoise is purposeful and demanding. When she enters this room, she points at Wheel King with her sword and denounces him for his promise to Zeng. After finding this threat useless, she immediately changes her strategy and tries to seduce him. When she undresses, she tries to persuade Wheel King to teach her the magic martial arts inherent in the remains of Luo Mo. Turquoise is confident that Wheel King can defeat other contenders for the remains. In contrast, although Wheel King is the visual subject in this scene, it seems that he plays a passive role compared to Turquoise. He responds to Turquoise's request by failing to answer directly. Because he loves Turquoise (which is clearly revealed later in the film), he does not want to disappoint Turquoise, especially before his penis re-grows with the help of the magic inherent in Luo Mo's remains. Therefore, in this sexual encounter, Turquoise plays an active role while Wheel King is passive.

Secondly, questions about whether two directors of this film make Wheel King an active gazer and whether they adopt his point of view to enjoy a woman's body also need to be re-considered. In general, when Turquoise flirts with Wheel King by exposing her naked body, the camera focuses more on Wheel King's outward calm rather than Turquoise's erotic image. At first, the camera shoots from Wheel King's side from which Turquoise's face as well as her naked image could be looked at. (Fig 5.09) However, the camera just frames her face as well her shoulders out of focus. Instead, the focus is Wheel King's intricate, rather than pleased, expression. When Wheel King turns his face towards Turquoise, the focus of this shot follows his sight and gradually centres on Turquoise's image. (Fig 5.10) Although Turquoise's image is lighted up in the centre of the screen at this moment, the camera does not move closer to her and no more fragments of her body are shown. In the reverse shot,

Turquoise's naked back appears and occupies half of the screen. (Fig 5.11) However, the focus switches back to Wheel King rather than Turquoise. Wheel King's passionless, rather than desiring, expression is emphasised, whereas Turquoise's naked back is unfocused and darkened.

As the plot goes, this scene could be a very erotic one, yet the actual visual presentation on screen is not erotic at all. Designs like focusing on limited part of Turquoise's body and making her naked back an out-of-focus image could be understood as an obedience to film censorship. However, whether a scene is erotic or not does not rest only with how much the naked body is exposed. In this scene, the main reason for the lack of erotic atmosphere may derive from the cold colour motif. It is evident that both the colour of Turquoise's body and the colour of the environment surrounding her are all cold. Even the colour of Wheel King's costume is cold, just like his passionless expression. Although Turquoise is the visual object of Wheel King, and Wheel King is encouraged to look at Turquoise's naked body, Wheel King is not encouraged to consume her image passionately in this scene. If audiences want to consume Barbie Hsu's naked body, they may directly gaze at her, rather than identify with Wheel King first, who is not endowed with any active passion.

Wheel King and Turquoise's sexual encounter is portrayed for the second time after Turquoise is wounded by Jiang Ah-sheng with a sword. Turquoise intrudes into Wheel King's room again and asks him to treat her wound. Their sexual encounter starts with Wheel King's petting on Turquoise's skin around the wound. As a result, Turquoise's sexual desire is immediately aroused. She seizes the initiative opportunity and expresses her desire for Wheel King until she finds he is a eunuch.



Fig 5.12



Fig 5.13



Fig 5.14



Fig 5.15



Fig 5.16



Fig 5.17

Unlike their first sexual encounter, their sexual affair at this time is initiated by Wheel King. Figs 5.12 and 5.13 directly convey his petting hand and attached sight on Turquoise's back. Then, he embraces Turquoise from her back. (Fig 5.14) Wheel King is quite active at the beginning of their sexual encounter. The previous sequence shows that Wheel King has already got the remains of Luo Mo and anatomised it before Turquoise's arrival. He has convinced himself that he has commanded the secret of the magic martial arts inherent in Luo Mo's remains, and will have his penis re-growing again. His confidence makes himself more active than before. However, even under such circumstance, he cannot continue with his active initiative position. In contrast, it is Turquoise who grabs the dominant position very quickly.

With Turquoise's sexual desire being aroused, Wheel King immediately loses his initiative, and is pushed against the door and kissed passionately (Figs 5.15, 5.16 and

5.17). From the figures attached, it is evident that Wheel King is confused about how he should react and what Turquoise will do next. He totally falls into the passive position in this sexual encounter. After finding Wheel King's eunuch identity, she loses her sexual interest in him and tells him that she killed her husband because of his impotency. In this film, Turquoise is masculinised by her overwhelming sexual desire which always makes her an active sexual seizer. Compared to Turquoise, Wheel King is feminised for his passivity in the pursuit of sexual pleasure. On the one hand, his passivity may come from his impotence; on the other hand, his passivity may also derive from his aspiration for love, rather than sex, as will be elaborated in the coming subsection.

5.4.2 Falling in love with a woman

The above sub-section focus on two sexual encounters of Wheel King and Turquoise. Mulvey's finding of the male-gazing and female-being-gazed-at pattern enlightens the investigation of their relationship at the very beginning. Later on, it proves that even though Turquoise is eroticised to be a visual object in the scene when she undresses herself for Wheel King, Wheel King is not portrayed as an active gazer. Instead, he looks passive and lost in response to Turquoise's sexual desire. The male-gazing and female-being-gazed-at pattern is not really established between these two characters. Therefore, Mulvey's finding may be insufficient in exploring these two characters' relationship, especially Wheel King's unusual behaviours in sexual encounters. Besides, in the previous films, the see/being seen dyad could usually be observed in establishing the hierarchical power relationship, especially of eunuchs and their subordinates. However, such a dualistic pattern of the gaze seems to lose its efficacy in structuring a similar hierarchical disparity, even though Wheel King is

superior to Turquoise in status. In other words, in his relationship with Turquoise, Wheel King's superiority and authority have never been presented as a privilege of gazing at Turquoise's body. In the sub-section, the French philosopher and linguist Roland Barthes' findings of lover's discourse will be employed to further examine the construction of Wheel King. It will be shown that rather than pursuing pleasure in sexual encounters, he desires to become a love object of Turquoise.

In his noted work *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes elaborates a lover's image like this,

Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so; she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, cavalcades). It follows that in any man who utters the other's absence *something feminine* is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized. A man is not feminized because he is inverted but because he is in love.⁴⁰

This citation conveys how Barthes defines the lover's discourse as a feminine model. Barthes explains the lover's discourse by displaying a series of general social expectations for woman as well as man. Since woman, rather than man, is always expected to be in the role of waiting, uttering the absence of the other, elaborating her fictions and so on. Most of these activities are typical behaviours of one in love.

⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 13-14.

Therefore, woman is an ideal role to carry on the lover's discourse. Furthermore, the lover's discourse is qualified as a feminine model. In addition, Barthes emphasises that "a man is not feminized because he is inverted but because he is in love".⁴¹ This shows that a man is not feminised for taking a woman's role, like taking the sedentary lifestyle and waiting at home. This man should be in a lover's role which involves not only waiting, but also suffering "from his waiting".⁴²

In *Reign of Assassins*, Wheel King's love to Turquoise is in evidence. Before Wheel King gets the remains of Luo Mo, he hides his love deeply. When Turquoise intrudes into Wheel King's room for the first time, she threatens him secretly with her sword pointing at him from his back. Unexpectedly, Wheel King finds Turquoise's movement, though he does not fight back. He is not even angry. This does not mean that Wheel King is a kind person with good temper. He claims that no one who betrays the Dark Stone gang can live. Therefore, when Zeng tries to quit from the gang, Wheel King decides to kill her. However, he forgives Turquoise, despite her threat to his life. Both Zeng and Turquoise are Wheel King's apprentices. However, he intentionally devised four loopholes in Zeng's sword strategy, yet does not do that to Turquoise according to his words. Turquoise undoubtedly is a special woman for Wheel King.

After obtaining Luo Mo's remains and learning Luo Mo's secret, Wheel King starts to disclose his love to Turquoise. Confronted with Turquoise's shocked reaction towards his status as a eunuch, Wheel King tries to convince Turquoise that he has found Luo Mo's secret which will help him become a real man very soon. His reaction toward Turquoise's shock and his explanation about Luo Mo's secret convey

⁴¹ Ibid., 14.

⁴² Ibid.

his passion for Turquoise. Meantime, he states his resentment about his fragmented body and his aspiration to rehabilitate his penis. At last, he confesses his love for Turquoise and his longing for a mundane couple life with her. Irrespective of Turquoise loves him or not, Wheel King's actions outline a clear fact that he is in love.

Barthes says, "who, if not the woman, the one who does not make for any object but only for ...giving? So that if a lover manages to 'love,' it is precisely insofar as he feminizes himself ..."⁴³ In *Reign of Assassins*, Wheel King is always in the position of giving, while Turquoise occupies the position of taking. Before becoming a member of Dark Stone gang, Turquoise is a condemned prisoner, who killed her husband, and waiting execution. Wheel King rescues her from the death cell. It is worth-noting that Turquoise, as a subordinate of the key eunuch, owns similar experience of her counterparts in *wuxia* genre in the 1990s. In tales back then, condemned prisoners who are rescued by the key eunuch will work for this eunuch until death. These prisoners are always in the position of giving, while the leading eunuch is in the position of taking. Contrarily, the construction of Turquoise totally inverts such giving and taking relation. After rescuing Turquoise from her capital punishment, Wheel King teaches her martial arts. After defeating Zeng, he gives Turquoise Zeng's sword. Other assassins take care of themselves after getting injured, while only Turquoise comes to Wheel King for treatment. Turquoise keeps asking for advancing her status and martial skills, as well as Wheel King's sexual love before she knows his secret. However, Wheel King's only requirement, shown in the film, is for Turquoise to be with him forever. As a lover, who yearns for Turquoise's love, Wheel King constantly feminises himself by ceaseless giving.

⁴³ Ibid, 126.

Along with the lover's discourse, Barthes has also stated that "the one who would accept the 'injustices' of communication, the one who would continue speaking lightly, tenderly, without being answered, would acquire a great mastery: the mastery of the Mother".⁴⁴ From the moment when Wheel King's secret as a eunuch is discovered by Turquoise, he becomes desperate to explain and yearns for Turquoise's empathy. He describes how terrible it is after becoming a eunuch and how hard he has tried to make up for his deficiency. This film is the first Hong Kong *wuxia* film which contains the scene in which the eunuch directly utters his psychological trauma caused by physical castration. Wheel King speaks constantly and tenderly, without being asked or answered. He has not read the clearly mocking attitude in Turquoise's eyes. He confesses himself, describes his encounter, displays his trauma and expresses his love in front of Turquoise, just because he is in love. In contrast, Turquoise does not show any sympathy or understanding for Wheel King, and wants to leave him immediately. In the process of casting Wheel King as a lover pursuer, he is repeatedly feminised. This not only explains his passive response to Turquoise's sexual desire, but also helps the understanding of an invalid binary gaze structure between them. The construction of a lover's discourse impairs the possibility of re-establishing a hierarchical power structure.

5.5 Eunuch images in the endless dance of *yin* and *yang*⁴⁵

The above sections examined the new images of eunuchs in co-productions in the western theoretical framework. However, as images drawn from Chinese history or

⁴⁴ Ibid, 159.

⁴⁵ The term "the endless dance" is drawn from Bob Hodge and Kam Louie's paper "Gender and the Classification of Chinese Characters". It is used to introduce the opposition system which is universally existed in everywhere. See *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, ed. Anonia Finnane & Anne McLaren (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), 146-150.

Chinese novels with a historical background, these eunuchs should also be studied in the Chinese gender system – the *yin-yang* matrix, so as to give a thorough understanding of the transition of their characteristics. Most Chinese cultural phenomena can be interpreted in terms of the Taoist notions of *yin* and *yang* in traditional Chinese philosophy. The terms *yin* and *yang* in Chinese culture are paraphrased in varied ways. Specifically, *yin* and *yang* can respectively be symbolized by various pairs of opposite polarities, such as earth/sky, moon/sun, female/male, subject/sovereign, down/up, cold/hot, dark/light, negative/positive, etc. Generally speaking, *yin* and *yang* are “a way of describing relationships between things”.⁴⁶ They are “basic opposing forces... which keep the world and all of life spinning”.⁴⁷ Moreover, *yin* and *yang* stand for the logic used to understand nature, culture and the disciplines of society. For instance, in a work of the leading Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200), the relationship of rites and music is interpreted by the concepts of *yin* and *yang*.⁴⁸ It is shown that, just like *yin* and *yang*, rites (*li* 礼) and music (*yue* 乐) are two disciplines that govern different areas, yet share the same noumenon.⁴⁹ Besides, based on their study of the Chinese masculinities and

⁴⁶ Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom ed., *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 26.

⁴⁷ Martin Palmer, ed. and trans. *T'ung Shu: The Ancient Chinese Almanac* (London: Rider and Company, 1986), 32.

⁴⁸ Neo-Confucianism, a school of thought, emerged in Song Dynasty and played a crucial role in Chinese culture afterwards. It critically absorbed Taoist and Buddhist elements, yet still inherited Confucian thought to be the core. Generally speaking, this school of thought developed a rationalist philosophy with its emphasis on moralities and ethics.

⁴⁹ Zhu Xi, *Lun Meng Jing Yi* (论孟精义, Essential Writings of Confucianism: The Analects and the Mencius), *Zhu Zhi Quan Zhuan* (朱子全传, Complete Works of Zhu Xi) Vol. 7, ed. Jieren Zhu, Zuozhi Yan and Yongxia Liu (Shanghai and Hefei: Shanghai guji chubanshe and Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 52.

Chinese original: 《论孟精义》卷一上: “禮樂之道, 異用而同體, 相反以相成。陰陽也, 剛柔也, 動靜也, 仁義也, 文武也, 莫不如是, 何独礼乐不然乎?”

English version: *Lun Meng Jing Yi/Essential Writings of Confucianism*, the first half of Chapter One: “Rites and music are two disciplines that govern different areas, yet share the same noumenon; they oppose yet complement each other. This type of relationship is also identifiable in the relationship

femininities, Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom point out that *yin* and *yang* do not necessarily refer to the relationship between the female and male, but are rather associated with feminine and masculine principles respectively.⁵⁰

Chen Lai and Mou Zhongjian suggest that Chinese culture is textured by the *yin/yang* school; if Taoism and Confucianism are to be marked with *yin* and *yang*, *yin* should stand for Taoism while *yang* stands for Confucianism.⁵¹ Generally, Taoism centres on the relation between humans and nature; while Confucianism focuses on the relation between humans and society. Taoism upholds the natural way to organise a human being's life or a society; while Confucianism highlights the management of a human's life or a society with rites and ethical codes. Furthermore, a detached attitude toward society could be associated with Taoism, while an attached attitude could be linked to Confucianism.

When Brownell and Wasserstrom study the significance of social gender over anatomical sex, they make mention of the gender of eunuchs in Chinese history. According to their discussion, eunuchs' pursuits like "marriage, children, and household headship; occupation of male categories in the kinship system; and male clothing" are deemed as symbols of masculinity.⁵² It is evident that all these pursuits are socially and culturally coded and can be traced back to men's social roles as drawn up in the three cardinal guides, which are among the main tenets of

between two paired forces of *yin* and *yang*, of hard and soft, of activity and stillness, of kindheartedness and righteousness and of *wen* and *wu*. Translation mine.

⁵⁰ Brownell and Wasserstrom, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, 26.

⁵¹ Chen Lai (陈来), a famous professor in philosophy who has worked in several top universities like Peking University, Tsinghua University, etc. Mou Zhongjian (牟钟鉴), a scholar in religious department in Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. They have discussed the relation between Confucianism and Taoism together, and the title of this conversation is "The Conversation between Confucianism and Taoism", *china.com.cn*. 23 March. 2009, accessed 1 May. 2016. http://big5.china.com.cn/culture/zhuantilz/2009-03/23/content_17486842.htm

⁵² Brownell and Wasserstrom, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, 27.

Confucianism.⁵³ The three cardinal guides highlight men's roles as ruler, husband and father.⁵⁴ Accordingly, eunuchs who want to marry a woman, adopt a child and acquire household headship are upholding the Confucian thought and are in the process of masculinisation. In this respect, Wheel King in *Reign of Assassins* is portrayed as having a masculine tendency, since he really wants to become a real man and marry Turquoise. However, if we examine Wheel King's image closely, his pursuit of marriage can hardly be described as having a masculine tendency.

Despite their opposite positions, Dizzle/Zeng and Wheel King, both famous assassins in *Reign of Assassins*, have similar wishes—to cease being assassins. Such a wish makes this film quite different from many previous *wuxia* films. *Wuxia* novelist Louis Cha (查良鏞) writes in his work *The Return of the Condor Heroes* that, “a great knight will fight for the state and the people”.⁵⁵ Such a motto has influenced most famous *wuxia* novels and films, which commonly contain the storyline in which the hero/heroine endeavours to become excellent so as to defeat the villains and save the people. Villains, on the other hand, are greedy for power in various respects, but they are eventually defeated. Generally speaking, in the *wuxia* genre, both heroes/heroines and villains undergo a rite of passage to achieve expertise in kung fu in order to

⁵³ Three cardinal guides are first proposed in Legalism, and then upheld in Confucianism.
Chinese original: 《韩非子·忠孝》, “臣事君, 子事父, 妻事夫, 三者顺, 天下治; 三者逆, 天下乱。”
English version: *Han Fei Tzu*, “Loyalty and Filial Piety: A Memorial”: “Minister serving ruler, son serving father, and wife serving husband, if these three relationships run in harmony, All-under-Heaven will have order; if these three relationships run in discord, All-under-Heaven will have disorder.”
This translation is quoted from “Loyalty and Filial Piety: A Memorial”, *The Complete Works of Han Fei Tzū: A Classic of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 2, trans. W. K. Liao (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1959), 312.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Chinese original: 金庸, 《神雕侠侣》第二十回: “侠之大者, 为国为民”。
English translation: Louise Cha, *Divine Eagle, Gallant Knight/The Return of Condor Heroes*, Chapter Twenty: “xia at a higher spiritual level should have a national sentiment which is expressed as a sense of patriotism and responsibility for the people”. Translation mine.

influence society. Even if a hero chooses to be detached, he fulfils his social responsibility when required to do so; while most villains never give up their ambitions to seize more power till death.

In contrast, *Reign of Assassins* organises the heroine's and the villain's storylines into a different direction. From the beginning of this film, the female protagonist Drizzle/Zeng makes a decision to quit her life as an assassin. After disguising her face, she hides her sword as well as her high kung fu skills, moves to a new place and chooses to live in a crowd, rather than in the wild. In Chinese culture, there are different ways to practice reclusion: living in the wilderness, staying in the crowd or holding office or a position at court. Wang Kangju (王康琚, the Eastern Jin Dynasty) ranks these ways of reclusion and points out that escaping into the wilderness is merely superficial reclusion, which is what Boyi did; whereas remaining detached in thought yet living in the crowd or taking a position at court is the practice of reclusion at a superior level, which is what Lao Tzu did.⁵⁶ What Wang suggests is that reclusion lies in the spirit rather than the physical body. What one holds in the mind counts more than where one lives or what position one occupies.

Drizzle/Zeng casts away her status as the best assassin and lives as a mundane woman. What she pursues is to live in a harmony without dispute, violence or massacre. Wherever she lives, her choice of lifestyle embraces Taoist philosophy,

⁵⁶ Kangju Wang, "Anti-Hermit Poem", *Wen Xuan* (文选, Selections of Refined literature), compiled by Tong Xiao, annotated by Shan Li (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 310.

The first two lines of this poem in Chinese are “小隐隐陵藪，大隐隐朝市。伯夷窜首阳。老聃伏柱史。” The stories this poem involves are as below. Boyi is one son of the Lord of Guzhu state. He lived during the transition between the Shang Dynasty (17th century BC – 11th century BC) and the Zhou Dynasty (11th century BC – 256 BC). He leaved Guzhu with the aim to let his bother to the throne; after Shang Dynasty had been conquered by Zhou Dynasty, he chose to live in the wilderness, say, Mountain Shouyang, and fed on wild plants rather than grains, say, foods grown on Zhou's territory. His seclusion behaviours have kept being valued as representations of valuable moral virtues. Lao Tzu was a philosopher lived in the 6th century BC. He has been deemed as the founder of Taoism. He held the detached thought, yet still took a position at court.

which encourages detachment from struggling for fame, fortune or other social benefits. Similar motives can also be found in the villain character Wheel King. Despite being the head of the largest and most sinister gang, which controls the appointment and dismissal of most officials, Wheel King's goal is not to consolidate his status, but to become a real man and live an ordinary life with the woman he loves. When he confesses his love to Turquoise and his wish to marry her, Wheel King promises that he will renounce martial arts, give up his status, and live with Turquoise in seclusion. He further proposes that their future life will be exclusively for the two of them, involving only himself and Turquoise. When Brownell and Wasserstrom define a eunuch's marriage as a symbol of masculinity, they indirectly adopt a Confucian thought, since they believe that it is by this effort that eunuchs try to "define themselves as social males".⁵⁷ However, the effort Wheel King makes can hardly be deemed as struggling for a position for social recognition, since he expects to live with Turquoise outside the crowd. It may be more accurate to say that what Wheel King longs for is love, which centres on his personal feeling, rather than marriage, which is mainly coded by society. Therefore, his longing to live with a woman for the rest of his life reflects the Taoist belief which values detachment from society, rather than Confucian thought, which encourages social engagement. From this perspective, Wheel King's pursuit could be deemed as performing the *yin* discipline.

Compared to Wheel King, the character Yu in *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* has a totally different objective. If the Taoism/Confucianism school may be introduced to define him, it might say that Yu practices Confucian thought rather than Taoist thought in respect to his ambition and action. He designs to trap the hero Zhao as well

⁵⁷ Brownell and Wasserstrom, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, 27.

as Zhao's confederates, and tries to defeat the East Bureau by eradicating Zhao's group. The ultimate goal of his plan, as well as the reason for his submissive behaviour before Concubine Wan, is to consolidate his political status. He holds an active, attached attitude toward society. In this respect, the construction of Yu displays the *yang* discipline.

However, from a different perspective, Yu is given a *yin* position politically. In Chinese history, emperors as well as their concubines occupy a *yang* position compared to officials, who are associated with *yin* position.⁵⁸ In the previous *wuxia* films, eunuchs, as officials, always occupy the *yang* position in regard to their political status, since no character who holds a higher political position can be found. The figures of the emperor and his concubines are absent in these films unless they are manipulated by these powerful eunuchs. In the film *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, although the emperor is still absent, it is shown that Yu obeys the Concubine Wan. A plot in which the key eunuch obeys a woman cannot be found in previous Hong Kong *wuxia* films. In the scene of their sexual encounter, Yu addresses Wan with her political title, and names himself as her servant. Wan reminds Yu that his main task should be helping her to monopolize the emperor's favour by eradicating the emperor's other women. Yu behaves like a loyal servant of Wan, and swears that he will not tolerate any women who may be loved by the emperor. In his relation with Wan, Yu is assigned to the *yin* position.

⁵⁸ Zhenyu Zeng and Yongju Fu annotate, *Chuqiu Fanlu with New Annotations* (春秋繁露新注) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2010), 260.
 Chinese original: 《春秋繁露》：“君为阳，臣为阴；父为阳，子为阴；夫为阳，妻为阴。”
 English translation: *Chuqiu Fanlu/ Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*: “The ruler, father and husband meet the quality of *yang*, while the subject, son and wife meet the quality of *yin*.”
 Translation mine.

Apart from Yu's political role and activities, Yu's name is also noteworthy in terms of his distinction. Yu's name in Chinese consists of three characters *yu* (雨), *hua* (化), and *tian* (田). *Yu* and *tian* can be translated literally as rain and field; *hua* is usually used as a verb to depict processes like metaplasmy, variance, moistening, persuasion, resolving and so on. Combining them together naturally leads to a poetic imagery which can be described as the rain moistening and nourishing the field. No directors except Tsui have used such poetic Chinese characters to name a eunuch in the *wuxia* genre.

Eunuchs' names in films always derive from names of eunuchs in history. For instance, Wei Zhongxian (魏忠贤) in *The Assassin* (1993) and Wang Zhen (王振) in *Secret Service of the Imperial Court* (1984) are names of real eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty; Cao Shaoqin (曹少钦) in *Dragon Inn* (1967) and *New Dragon Gate Inn* (1992) is a name which derives from the real eunuchs' names Cao Jixiang (曹吉祥) and Cao Qin (曹钦) in the Ming Dynasty. Besides, the deferential title Gonggong (公公), which was always used to refer to eunuchs, is adopted to constitute their names in films such as Chen Gonggong (陈公公) in *The Heroic Trio* (1993).

Yu Huatian, however, is a fictional name, and has a natural, peaceful and harmonious connotation. With close analysis of eunuchs' names in the *wuxia* genre, it is evident that names of previous eunuch characters always embodied a Confucian's ideology, while Yu's name displays that of Taoism. For instance, *zhong* (忠) refers to loyalty; *xian* (贤) stands for virtue; *qin* (钦) means respect or having royal blessing. Yu's name embodies features of nature in two layers. On the one hand, the characters *yu* and *tian* convey images of tangible or visible nature; on the other hand, the

imagery that the drizzle moistens the earth expresses a philosophical attitude which is natural, rather than prescribed. The latter layer is in accordance with Taoist thought, in which the natural refers to a logic. Names like Wei Zhongxian and Cao Shaoqin express a discipline which stands for the ethically prescribed or coded. Their names are therefore expressive of Confucian thought. Considering the relationship between Taoism thought and Confucianism thought in the dimension of *yin* and *yang*, eunuchs' names in the previous films always display a *yang* discipline, while Yu's name interprets a *yin* discipline.

In addition to their imagery, the Chinese characters in Yu's name also have direct relations with *yin* discipline. In the work *Rites of Zhou*, *yu*, which stands for the rainy, is directly written as *yin*.⁵⁹ According to Chinese classical thought, *hua*, which has the meaning of metaplasmy, can symbolise a process dominated by the *yin* discipline. At the other end of the spectrum is the process of impartation, named *shi* (施), dominated by the *yang* discipline.⁶⁰ *Tian* refers to the earth as used to grow plants; it can be used to symbolise *yin* when the imagery of the sky comes to shape the *yang* force. Literally, every Chinese character of Yu's name has a close relationship with the *yin* discipline.

However, it is not completely unquestionable to say that his name embodies an ascending tendency of the *yin* logic in the popular culture. *Yin* and *yang* can be

⁵⁹ *Yin* in the term *yin-yang* (阴阳) in Chinese shares the same character with *yin* in the word *yinyu* (阴雨), which means the rain. In ancient Chinese, *yu* (雨), the rain, sometimes was directly written as *yin* (阴). This usage could be found in Jia Gongyan's sub-commentary to *Rites of Zhou*. Xueqin Li, ed. *Zhou Li Zhu Shu* (周礼注疏, Commentary and Subcommentary to Rites of Zhou), commentated by Xuan Zheng, sub-commentated by Gongyan Jia (Beijing: Beijin daxue chubanshe, 1999), 252.

⁶⁰ These meanings of *hua* (化) and *shi* (施) and their relationship to *yin-yang* described above could be identified in the Chinese phrase *yang shi yin hua* (阳施阴化). See *The Book of Rites by Dai, Senior*, compiled by Dai De of the Han Dynasty · *The Book of Rites by Dai, Senior, with Complementary Notes*, by Kong Guangsen of the Qing Dynasty (大戴礼记·大戴礼记补注), edited by The Editorial Department of the Complete Works of Confucian Culture (Jinan: Shandong youyi chubanshe, 1991), 117.

interpreted as the opposite sides, rather than the fixed traits, of every phenomenon. They continue to be involved in a reciprocal transformation. Anything that symbolises *yin* in one system may symbolise *yang* in another system. For instance, compared to the sun, the rain symbolises *yin*, while compared to the snow, the rain symbolises *yang*; the earth always symbolises *yin* in comparison with the sky, however it can also be divided into the ground surface and the underground, which symbolise *yang* and *yin* respectively. Therefore, in order to examine the transformation of *yin* and *yang* disciplines in popular culture, names like Yu Huatian and Wheel King should be positioned into a system of comparison. The characters in their names alone are not sufficient to illustrate the cultural transformation.

Eunuchs' names in Hong Kong's *wuxia* films made in the last century and their names in films produced at the beginning of this century constitute a clear comparison. As mentioned above, most names of the eunuch characters in *wuxia* films except Yu derive from names of historical persons. The name Yu Huatian is fictional; and the name Wheel King is legendary, because it derives from a Buddhist tale and refers to a king living in hell.⁶¹ To apply the *yin/yang* logic, the fictional names should be termed as *yin*, while the historical names should be termed as *yang*. This is because fiction represents the illusory or *xu* in Chinese, and history, the real or *shi*. They symbolise *yin* and *yang* respectively.⁶² From the comparison of these names, it is evident that the *yin* discipline plays an important role in establishing the personalities of eunuchs in

⁶¹ The Wheel King's image can be found in various Buddhist works, such as *Yu Li Bao Chao* (玉历宝钞). In this work, the Wheel King is one of the Kings of Hell.

⁶² *Yin* and *yang* are originally symbolised as two trigrams which are respectively shaped with broken line and solid line, named *Yinyao* and *Yangyao*. They form the original comparison between *xu*, insubstantial, and *shi*, substantial, in Chinese. *Xu* and *shi*, as paired ideas which oppose and complement each other, can be interpreted into various paired expressions, such as empty and full, weak and strong, incontinuity and continuity, fake and real, loose and stable and so on. The paired ideas the illusory and the real, which are written as *xu* and *shi* in Chinese, are inextricably associated with the *yin-yang* matrix.

recent films. Although as a whole the *yang* discipline is still dominant, the *yin* discipline has clearly shown an ascending tendency.

5.6 Conclusion

In light of relevant Western theories and the Chinese traditional philosophy this chapter analyses two eunuch images Yu and Wheel King, and identifies and examines several major changes emerged in the construction of eunuch images in Hong Kong films. Not only do these changes embody new traits in these images, but also challenge the popular dualistic masculine model of the past several decades.

This situation does not definitely mean that the masculinity in the eunuch characters has been substituted or totally inverted. Neither is it sufficient to make such conclusion with only two eunuch images being examined. Based on the transformation of eunuch images, this chapter argues that a developmental tendency of the feminine model or *yin* discipline has been happening in Hong Kong co-productions, as evidenced by the popularity of these films. Regarding these popular co-productions, Hong Kong scholar Pang Lai-kwan points out that “there is a clear tendency toward the blurring of boundaries between Hong Kong and China in these major commercial productions, and it can be argued that absorption occurs in both directions”.⁶³ This being the case, the Hong Kong-made power icon – the eunuch – could have been re-shaped in these co-productions and become a woman’s sexual object or love object. On the surface, they are still hungry for power and dominance; however, the camera angles as well as narrative strategies employed by directors

⁶³ Pang, “Postcolonial Hong Kong Cinema: Utilitarianism and (Trans)local”, 424.

typically display their passive sides and construct them as the characters who are desired by women, rather than pursuing their desire.

Conclusion

The transformation of eunuch images in Hong Kong *wuxia* films provides an insight into the dynamics of social development and cultural evolution of a fast-changing Hong Kong, from a former British colony to a Special Administrative Region of China. From the masculine to the feminine, the transformation represents a transition of gender presentation of the eunuch image, outlines the variation of cultural values embodied in Hong Kong films, reveals the strategic change in power construction, and exhibits a shift of logical mechanism between a dualistic economy and a pluralistic strategy.

The stereotypical image of the powerful eunuch in *wuxia* genre initially appeared in King Hu's film in the 1960s, a turbulent age in Hong Kong's modern history. As an intellectual who has faith in traditional Chinese morality, defining the eunuch as the villain, as the evil other, helped him to reassure the morality and positive spirits of Chinese culture, such as loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness, because the eunuch had long been regarded as the role who may easily violate the moral standards and socio-political stability cherished in Chinese society. Furthermore, eunuch image symbolises an upside down world where *yin* occupies the position of *yang*. To be specific, most notorious historical eunuchs are known for stealing imperial power which should not be assigned to them, according to Confucian doctrine. Such a reversal of traditional social roles could be used as a metaphor for Hong Kong society of the 1960s and 1970s: on the one hand, western corrupted ideals were overturning Chinese tradition; on the other hand, the chaotic political turmoil in Mainland China was threatening the cultural foundation of Chinese civilisation. Hu's

masculinisation of the image of historical eunuch, who, in his mind, should be in the role of *yin* and characteristically feminised, echoes his criticism of the chaotic social reality in the turbulent age.

Along with Hong Kong's economic take-off which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s and especially in the latter decade, the ideals of the newly fledging Hong Kong bourgeoisie endows the personal achievement with more importance. This creates the possibility for the point of view of a vicious but powerful eunuch being accepted and employed to advance the cinematic narration. Meanwhile, admiration for personal achievement intertwined with rising public interest in male bodies, men's strength and masculine virtues. As the heroes' most important rivals, eunuchs were masculinised at an extreme level with their figures representing a naked ambition for power, control and dominance, and with their bodies becoming so hard that they can penetrate anything.

In the *wuxia* films of Hong Kong's "golden age" in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the eunuch becomes the power itself. With the date of handing over Hong Kong from Britain to China getting closer, Hong Kong people's anxiety of their powerlessness in choosing their own future became more and more intense. In dealing with the culture representation of power construction, Hong Kong filmmakers tended to identify with image of the inferior; this approach echoed Hong Kong people's sense of powerlessness in obtaining the right to speak on behalf of Hong Kong. Although most eunuchs were depicted as the one with super political power from the 1960s to the 1990s, they were filmed with an objective angle in the 1960s, but with a low angle in the 1990s. Such difference lies in that the 1960s directors did not criticise the power order at all, while 1990s ones shown a challenge attitude towards the

hierarchical power. In the 1990s, the directors often place themselves in the lower position. However, although such a position displays a rebellious mood towards the authority, it shows that the mechanism behind constructing a dualistic power hierarchy is not impaired. Power, on the one hand, makes eunuchs tyrannical rulers; on the other hand, it shapes them into attractive idols from the perspective of the inferior.

After the implementation of CEPA between Hong Kong and Mainland China, Hong Kong filmmakers gained a great enthusiasm to explore and to make films for the northern market; then, the de-political image of eunuch in *wuxia* genre took shape in these co-productions. With the cultural specificities of Hong Kong being impaired in the new market, a new space has also been shaped in which Hong Kong filmmakers are on the way to restore the vitality as well as distinction of Hong Kong culture. Eunuch characters created for the new market are different from their previous counterparts in a very important way: the eunuchs, in films from the 1960s to the 1990s, were depicted to be devils who pursued power and upheld military values; but although, on the surface, the new eunuchs are still hungry for power and are powerful in most aspects, being the power icon is not their foremost function. Instead, their passive sides are portrayed from different angles. Generally, eunuch images of still represent a masculine model in their pursuit of power, but the way they are presented is more feminised. They are portrayed as sexual objects desired by women who actively pursue them sexually and they have to play a passive role in pleasing the women. Their images as killing monsters are played down and their impersonation makes them multi-dimensional characters with more complexities than their previous counterparts. Besides, their indefinite gender characteristics are used as a seductive device beyond the dualistic economy to increase eunuchs' appeal to audiences.

The studies of the transformation in characterising the eunuch in Hong Kong's *wuxia* genre from the 1960s to the early 2010s outline the transition of Hong Kong film from a very small angle. However, this is a quite prominent angle. Most of the stereotypical eunuchs are prominent images of Hong Kong film, especially considering that there are noticeable eunuch images in a very few number which have been created in Chinese-language films in Mainland China and Taiwan. Therefore, the transformation of these images establishes a pertinent reference frame for exploring the development of the film culture of Hong Kong.

During the past half century, the eunuch image underwent a transition from being extremely masculinised, to being feminised. Meanwhile, the de-political representation appeared to be a new feature in the construction of powerful eunuchs in the new century. These variations indicate the emergence of a new model in depicting eunuch images in Hong Kong film. The transformation of these "Hong Kong-made" eunuchs in the new co-productions could be evidence of Hong Kong filmmakers' struggle in a dilemma, since the new eunuch images have had a series of Hong Kong specificities lost. However, what should be borne in mind is that the so-called "loss" is an idea found on a nostalgic adherence to a past Hong Kong vogue. From a different perspective, the changes of eunuch images also provide an insight into the dynamics of Hong Kong film which can always find its way in an ever-changing environment. The new characteristics of the new eunuchs reveal Hong Kong filmmakers' trying to adapt to the new cultural sphere around Hong Kong. It is perhaps the time to review the so-called "dilemma" of Hong Kong film in the new century. Is it really a "dilemma" that marks the decadence of Hong Kong film? Or, it might be a clue of a vibrant tomorrow.

Filmography

***Wuxia* Films with powerful eunuchs characterised in Hong Kong vogue**

1967

Hu, Jinquan. *Dragon Inn* (龙门客栈, Longmen kezhan).

1971

Yen, Jung-tsu. *The Eunuch* (鬼太监, Gui taijian).

1976

Sung, Ting-mei. *Shaolin Traitorous* (大太监, Da taijian).

1979

Luo, Chi. *Ninja Wolves* (锦衣卫, Jinyiwei).

Wu, Ma. *Eunuch of the Western Palace* (白马素车勾魂幡, Baima suche gouhunfan).

1984

Lu, Chin-Ku. *Secret Service of the Imperial Court* (锦衣卫, Jingyiwei).

1990

Hu, Jinquan and Tsui Hark. *Swordsman* (笑傲江湖, Xiao'ao jianghu).

1991

Zhang, Pengyi. *The Monks from Shaolin* (智勇和尚, Zhiyong heshang).

1992

Lee, Wai-man. *New Dragon Gate Inn* (新龙门客栈, Xin Longmen kezhan).

Wong, Jing and Chung Siu-hung. *Royal Tramp* (鹿鼎记, Lu ding ji).

1993

Chu, Yen-ping. *Flying Dagger* (神经刀与飞天猫, Shenjin dao yu feitian mao).

Chu, Yen-ping. *Slave of Sword* (剑奴, Jian nu).

Chung, Siu-hung. *The Assassin* (刺客新传之杀人者唐斩, Cike xinzhuan zhi sharen zhe Tang Zhan).

Mak, Dong-kit. *Butterfly & Sword* (新流星蝴蝶剑, Xin liuxing hudie jian).

To, Kei-fung. *The Heroic Trio* (东方三侠, Dongfang san xia).

Yuen, Woo-ping. *The Tai-Chi Master* (太极张三丰, Taiji Zhang Sanfeng).

1994

Law, Man. *The Kung Fu Scholar* (流氓状元, Liurang zhuangyuan).

2010

Chu, Yen-ping. *Just Call Me Nobody* (大笑江湖, Daxiao jianghu).

Lee, Yan-kong. *14 Blades* (锦衣卫, Jinyiwei).

Su, Chao-bin and John Woo. *Reign of Assassins* (剑雨, Jian yu).

Wu, Ershan. *The Butcher, the Chef and the Swordsman* (刀见笑, Dao jian xiao).

2011

Tsui, Hark. *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* (龙门飞甲, Longmen fei jia).

2012

Lee, Wai-man. *New Dragon Gate Inn* (新龙门客栈, Xin Longmen kezhan).

Remastered version.

2014

Lu, Yang. *Brotherhood of Blades* (绣春刀, Xiu chun dao).

2016

Jiao, Yang. *Super Eunuch* (超能太监, Chaoneng taijian).

Jiao, Yang. *Super Eunuch II* (超能太监二之黄金右手, Chaoneng taijian er zhi huangjin youshou).

Other Films related to this thesis

1909

Liang, Shaobo. *Stealing Roast Duck* (偷烧鸭, Tou shaoya).

1913

Lai, Bak Hoi. *Chuang Tzu Tests His Wife* (庄子戏妻, Zhuangzi xi qi).

1928

Zhang, Shichuan. *Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* (火烧红莲寺, Huo shao honglian si).

1929

Chan, Hangyin. *Burns Windings Mansion* (火烧九曲楼, Huo shao jiu qu lou)

Xu, Xinfu. *Two Swordsmen* (两剑客, Liang jianke).

1930

Chan, Huangyin, Jeng Yat-sang and Shang Guanwu. *Swordswoman of Huangjiang* (荒江女侠, Huang jiang nüxia).

1940

Yeung, Ling-siu. *The Assassin* (鱼肠剑, Yu chang jian).

Man, Han Fei. *The Fve Swordsman's Nocturnal Tryst* (小五义深夜冲霄楼, Xiao wuyi shenye chong xiaolou).

1941

Yeung, Kung-leung. *The Furry Rat* (侠盗锦毛鼠, Xiadao Jinmaoshu).

1948

Zhu, Shilin. *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* (清宫秘史, Qinggong mishi).

1949

Wu, Pang. *Story of Huang Feihong* (黄飞鸿传).

1950

Chan, Hoi-man. *Burning of Red Lotus Monastery* (火烧红莲寺, Huo shao honglian si).

1956

Wu, Pang. *How Huang Feihong Conquered the Two Tigers* (黄飞鸿伏二虎, Huang Feihong fu er hu).

1966

Hu, Jinquan. *Come Drink with Me* (大醉侠, Da zui xia).

1967

Chang, Cheh. *The One-Armed Swordsman* (独臂刀, Du bi dao).

Cheng, Kang. *Kiss and Kill* (风流铁汉, Fengliu tiehan).

Filmography

Hu, Jinquan. *A Touch of Zen* (侠女, Xia nü).

Tai, Kao-mei. *The Black Falcon* (黑鹰, Hei ying).

1968

Chang, Cheh. *Golden Swallow* (金燕子, Jin yanzi).

1971

Lo, Wei. *The Big Boss* (唐山大兄, Tangshan da xiong).

1972

Jeong, Chang-hwa. *King Boxer* (天下第一拳, Tianxia diyi quan).

Lo, Wei. *Fist of Fury* (精武门, Jing wu men).

1974

Chang, Cheh. *Heroes Two* (方世玉与洪熙官, Fang Shiyu yu Hong Xiguan).

1978

Chung, Sun. *The Smiling, Proud Wanderer* (笑傲江湖, Xiao'ao jianghu).

1982

Chang Hsin-yan. *Shaolin Temple* (少林寺, Shaolinsi).

1987

Bertolucci, Bernardo. *The Last Emperor* (末代皇帝, Modai huangdi).

1988

Cheung, Chi-Leung. *Lai Shi, China's Last Eunuch* (中国最后一个太监, Zhongguo zuihou yige taijian).

Ke, Ren and Yu Mei. *The Ruthless Eunuch* (东厂喋血 Dongchang die xue).

1992

Ching, Siu-tung and Stanley Tong. *Swordsman II* (笑傲江湖之东方不败, Xiao'ao jianghu zhi dongfang bubai).

Hsia, Tsu-hui. *The Demon Wet Nurse* (半妖乳娘, Ban yao runiang).

Man, Kit Poon. *Twilight of the Forbidden City* (告别紫禁城, Gaobie zijincheng).

Tian, Zhuangzhuang. *Li Lianying: The Imperial Eunuch* (大太监李莲英, Da taijian Li Lianying).

1993

Chen, Kaige. *Farewell, My Concubine* (霸王别姬, Bawang bie ji).

Ching Siu-tung. *The East Is Red* (东方不败风云再起 Dongfang bubai fengyun zai qi).

1994

Wong, Jing. *Hail the Judge* (九品芝麻官, Jiupin zhima guan).

1995

Wong, Xinsheng. *Peach Blossom* (桃花满天红, Taohua mantianhong).

2000

Hung, Leung-yan. *Tortured Sex Goddess of Ming Dynasty* (极乐酷刑, Jile kuxing).

Lee, Ang. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (卧虎藏龙, Wohucanglong).

2002

Tsui, Hark. *Seven Swords* (七剑, Qi jian).

Zhang, Yimou. *Hero* (英雄, Yingxiong).

Filmography

2004

Zhang, Yimou. *House of Flying Daggers* (十面埋伏, Shimian maifu).

2008

Yip, Wilson. *Ip Man* (叶问, Yewen).

2010

Kwok, Derek, and Clement Cheung. *Gallants* (打擂台, Da leitai)

Yip, Wilson. *Ip Man II* (叶问 II, Yewen er).

2011

Chan, Peter. *Dragon* (武侠, Wuxia).

2013

Wong Kar-wai. *The Grandmaster* (一代宗师, Yidai zongshi).

2015

Xu, Haofeng. *The Master*. (师父, Shifu).

Yip, Wilson. *Ip Man III* (叶问 III, Yewen san).

TV Dramas

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